Gunston Classics

THE CHIMES

By
Charles Dickens

Images by
Arthur Rankham

Christmas Goblins

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By
Charles Dickens

Images by
Arthur Rankham

1844

LYONS HEAD
DIGITAL PUBLISHING SYNDICATION LLC

Gunston Classics
&
Lyons Head Publishing

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The First Quarter

There are not many people—and as it is desirable that a story-teller and a story-reader should establish a mutual understanding as soon as possible, I beg it to be noticed that I confine this observation neither to young people nor to little people, but extend it to all conditions of people: little and big, young and old: yet growing up, or already growing down again —there are not, I say, many people who would care to sleep in a church. I don't mean at sermon-time in warm weather (when the thing has actually been done, once or twice), but in the night, and alone. A great multitude of persons will be violently astonished, I know, by this position, in the broad bold Day. But it applies to Night. It must be argued by night, and I will undertake to maintain it successfully on any gusty winter's

night appointed for the purpose, with any one opponent chosen from the rest, who will meet me singly in an old churchyard, before an old church-door; and will previously empower me to lock him in, if needful to his satisfaction, until morning.

For the night wind has a dismal trick of wandering round and round a building of that sort, and moaning as it goes; and of trying, with its unseen hand, the windows and the doors; and seeking out some crevices by which to enter. And when it has got in; as one not finding what it seeks, whatever that may be, it wails and howls to issue forth again: and not content with stalking through the aisles, and gliding round and round the pillars, and tempting the deep organ, soars up to the roof, and strives to rend the rafters: then flings itself despairingly upon the stones below, and passes, muttering, into the vaults. Anon, it comes up stealthily, and creeps along the walls, seeming to read, in whispers, the Inscriptions sacred to the Dead. At some of these, it breaks out shrilly, as with laughter; and at others, moans and cries as if it were lamenting. It has a ghostly sound too, lingering within the altar; where it seems to chaunt, in its wild way, of Wrong and Murder done, and false Gods worshipped, in defiance of the Tables of the Law, which look so fair and smooth, but are so flawed and broken. Ugh! Heaven preserve us, sitting snugly round the fire! It has an awful voice, that wind at Midnight, singing in a church!

But, high up in the steeple! There the foul blast roars and whistles! High up in the steeple, where it is free to come and

go through many an airy arch and loophole, and to twist and twine itself about the giddy stair, and twirl the groaning weathercock, and make the very tower shake and shiver! High up in the steeple, where the belfry is, and iron rails are ragged with rust, and sheets of lead and copper, shrivelled by the changing weather, crackle and heave beneath the unaccustomed tread; and birds stuff shabby nests into corners of old oaken joists and beams; and dust grows old and grey; and speckled spiders, indolent and fat with long security, swing idly to and fro in the vibration of the bells, and never loose their hold upon their thread-spun castles in the air, or climb up sailor-like in quick alarm, or drop upon the ground and ply a score of nimble legs to save one life! High up in the steeple of an old church, far above the light and murmur of the town and far below the flying clouds that shadow it, is the wild and dreary place

at night: and high up in the steeple of an old church, dwelt the Chimes I tell of.

They were old chimes, trust me. Centuries ago, these bells had been baptized by bishops: so many centuries ago, that the register of their baptism was lost long, long before the memory of man, and no one knew their names. They had had their Godfathers and Godmothers, these Bells (for my own part, by the way, I would rather incur the responsibility of being Godfather to a Bell than a Boy), and had their silver mugs no doubt, besides. But Time had mowed down their sponsors, and Henry the Eighth had melted down their mugs; and they now hung, nameless and mugless, in the church-tower.

Not speechless, though. Far from it. They had clear, loud, lusty, sounding voices, had these Bells; and far and wide they might be heard upon the wind. Much too sturdy Chimes were they, to be dependent on the pleasure of the wind, moreover; for, fighting gallantly against it when it took an adverse whim, they would pour their cheerful notes into a listening ear right royally; and bent on being heard on stormy nights, by some poor mother watching a sick child, or some lone wife whose husband was at sea, they had been sometimes known to beat a blustering Nor'Wester; aye, "all to fits," as Toby Veck said; —for though they chose to call him Trotty Veck, his name was Toby, and nobody could make it anything else either (except Tobias) without a special act of parliament; he having been as lawfully christened in his day as the Bells had been in theirs,

though with not quite so much of solemnity or public rejoicing.

For my part, I confess myself of Toby Veck's belief, for I am sure he had opportunities enough of forming a correct one. And whatever Toby Veck said, I say. And I take my stand by Toby Veck, although he *did* stand all day long (and weary work it was) just outside the church-door. In fact he was a ticket-porter, Toby Veck, and waited there for jobs.

And a breezy, goose-skinned, blue-nosed, red-eyed, stony-toed, tooth-chattering place it was, to wait in, in the winter-time, as Toby Veck well knew. The wind came tearing round the corner—especially the east wind—as if it had sallied forth, express, from the confines of the earth, to have a blow at Toby. And oftentimes it seemed to come upon him sooner than it had expected, for bouncing round the corner, and passing Toby, it would suddenly wheel round again, as if it cried "Why, here he is!" Incontinently his little white apron would be caught up over his head like a naughty boy's garments, and his feeble little cane would be seen to wrestle and struggle unavailingly in his hand, and his legs would undergo tremendous agitation, and Toby himself all aslant, and facing now in this direction, now in that, would be so banged and buffeted, and touzled, and worried, and hustled, and lifted off his feet, as to render it a state of things but one degree removed from a positive miracle, that he wasn't carried up bodily into the air as a colony of frogs or snails or other very portable creatures sometimes are, and rained down again, to the great astonishment of the natives, on some

strange corner of the world where ticket-porters are unknown.

But, windy weather, in spite of its using him so roughly, was, after all, a sort of holiday for Toby. That's the fact. He didn't seem to wait so long for a sixpence in the wind, as at other times; the having to fight with that boisterous element took off his attention, and quite freshened him up, when he was getting hungry and low-spirited. A hard frost too, or a fall of snow, was an Event; and it seemed to do him good, somehow or other—it would have been hard to say in what respect though, Toby! So wind and frost and snow, and perhaps a good stiff storm of hail, were Toby Veck's red-letter days.

Wet weather was the worst; the cold, damp, clammy wet, that wrapped him up like a moist great-coat—the only kind of great-coat Toby owned, or could have added to his comfort by dispensing with. Wet days, when the rain came slowly, thickly, obstinately down; when the street's throat, like his own, was choked with mist; when smoking umbrellas passed and repassed, spinning round and round like so many teetotums, as they knocked against each other on the crowded footway, throwing off a little whirlpool of uncomfortable sprinklings; when gutters brawled and waterspouts were full and noisy; when the wet from the projecting stones and ledges of the church fell drip, drip, drip, on Toby, making the wisp of straw on which he stood mere mud in no time; those were the days that tried him. Then, indeed, you might see Toby looking anxiously out from his shelter in an angle of the church wall—

such a meagre shelter that in summer time it never cast a shadow thicker than a good-sized walking stick upon the sunny pavement—with a disconsolate and lengthened face. But coming out, a minute afterwards, to warm himself by exercise, and trotting up and down some dozen times, he would brighten even then, and go back more brightly to his niche.

They called him Trotty from his pace, which meant speed if it didn't make it. He could have Walked faster perhaps; most likely; but rob him of his trot, and Toby would have taken to his bed and died. It bespattered him with mud in dirty weather; it cost him a world of trouble; he could have walked with infinitely greater ease; but that was one reason for his clinging to it so tenaciously. A weak, small, spare old man, he was a very Hercules, this Toby, in his good intentions. He loved to earn his money. He delighted to believe—Toby was very poor, and couldn't well afford to part with a delight—that he was worth his salt. With a shilling or an eighteenpenny message or small parcel in hand, his courage, always high, rose higher. As he trotted on, he would call out to fast Postmen ahead of him, to get out of the way; devoutly believing that in the natural course of things he must inevitably overtake and run them down; and he had perfect faith—not often tested—in his being able to carry anything that man could lift.

Thus, even when he came out of his nook to warm himself on a wet day, Toby trotted. Making, with his leaky shoes, a crooked line of slushy footprints in the mire; and blowing on

his chilly hands and rubbing them against each other, poorly defended from the searching cold by threadbare mufflers of grey worsted, with a private apartment only for the thumb, and a common room or tap for the rest of the fingers; Toby, with his knees bent and his cane beneath his arm, still trotted. Falling out into the road to look up at the belfry when the Chimes resounded, Toby trotted still.

He made this last excursion several times a day, for they were company to him; and when he heard their voices, he had an interest in glancing at their lodging-place, and thinking how they were moved, and what hammers beat upon them. Perhaps he was the more curious about these Bells, because there were points of resemblance between themselves and him. They hung there, in all weathers, with the wind and rain driving in upon them; facing only the outsides of all those houses; never getting any nearer to the blazing fires that gleamed and shone upon the windows, or came puffing out of the chimney tops; and incapable of participation in any of the good things that were constantly being handed, through the street doors and the area railings, to prodigious cooks. Faces came and went at many windows: sometimes pretty faces, youthful faces, pleasant faces: sometimes the reverse: but Toby knew no more (though he often speculated on these trifles, standing idle in the streets) whence they came, or where they went, or whether, when the lips moved, one kind word was said of him in all the year, than did the Chimes themselves.

Toby was not a casuist—that he knew of, at least—and I don't mean to say that when he began to take to the Bells, and to knit up his first rough acquaintance with them into something of a closer and more delicate woof, he passed through these considerations one by one, or held any formal review or great field-day in his thoughts. But what I mean to say, and do say is, that as the functions of Toby's body, his digestive organs for example, did of their own cunning, and by a great many operations of which he was altogether ignorant, and the knowledge of which would have astonished him very much, arrive at a certain end; so his mental faculties, without his privity or concurrence, set all these wheels and springs in motion, with a thousand others, when they worked to bring about his liking for the Bells.

And though I had said his love, I would not have recalled the word, though it would scarcely have expressed his complicated feeling. For, being but a simple man, he invested them with a strange and solemn character. They were so mysterious, often heard and never seen; so high up, so far off, so full of such a deep strong melody, that he regarded them with a species of awe; and sometimes when he looked up at the dark arched windows in the tower, he half expected to be beckoned to by something which was not a Bell, and yet was what he had heard so often sounding in the Chimes. For all this, Toby scouted with indignation a certain flying rumour that the Chimes were haunted, as implying the possibility of their being

connected with any Evil thing. In short, they were very often in his ears, and very often in his thoughts, but always in his good opinion; and he very often got such a crick in his neck by staring with his mouth wide open, at the steeple where they hung, that he was fain to take an extra trot or two, afterwards, to cure it.

The very thing he was in the act of doing one cold day, when the last drowsy sound of Twelve o'clock, just struck, was humming like a melodious monster of a Bee, and not by any means a busy bee, all through the steeple!

"Dinner-time, eh!" said Toby, trotting up and down before the church. "Ah!"

Toby's nose was very red, and his eyelids were very red, and he winked very much, and his shoulders were very near his ears, and his legs were very stiff, and altogether he was evidently a long way upon the frosty side of cool.

"Dinner-time, eh!" repeated Toby, using his right-hand muffler like an infantine boxing-glove, and punishing his chest for being cold. "Ah-h-h-h!"

He took a silent trot, after that, for a minute or two.

"There's nothing," said Toby, breaking forth afresh—but here he stopped short in his trot, and with a face of great interest and some alarm, felt his nose carefully all the way up. It was but a little way (not being much of a nose) and he had soon finished.

"I thought it was gone," said Toby, trotting off again. "It's all right, however. I am sure I couldn't blame it if it was to go. It has a precious hard service of it in the bitter weather, and precious little to look forward to; for I don't take snuff myself. It's a good deal tried, poor creetur, at the best of times; for when it *does* get hold of a pleasant whiff or so (which an't too often), it's generally from somebody else's dinner, a-coming home from the baker's."

The reflection reminded him of that other reflection, which he had left unfinished.

"There's nothing," said Toby, "more regular in its coming round than dinner-time, and nothing less regular in its coming round than dinner. That's the great difference between 'em.

It's took me a long time to find it out. I wonder whether it would be worth any gentleman's while, now, to buy that obserwation for the Papers; or the Parliament!"

Toby was only joking, for he gravely shook his head in self-depreciation.

"Why! Lord!" said Toby. "The Papers is full of obserwations as it is; and so's the Parliament. Here's last week's paper, now;" taking a very dirty one from his pocket, and holding it from him at arm's length; "full of obserwations! Full of obserwations! I like to know the news as well as any man," said Toby, slowly; folding it a little smaller, and putting it in his pocket again: "but it almost goes against the grain with me to read a paper now. It frightens me almost. I don't know what we poor people are coming to. Lord send we may be coming to something better in the New Year nigh upon us!"

"Why, father, father!" said a pleasant voice, hard by.

But Toby, not hearing it, continued to trot backwards and forwards: musing as he went, and talking to himself.

"It seems as if we can't go right, or do right, or be righted," said Toby. "I hadn't much schooling, myself, when I was young; and I can't make out whether we have any business on the face of the earth, or not. Sometimes I think we must have —a little; and sometimes I think we must be intruding. I get so puzzled sometimes that I am not even able to make up my mind whether there is any good at all in us, or whether we are born bad. We seem to be dreadful things; we seem to give a

deal of trouble; we are always being complained of and guarded against. One way or other, we fill the papers. Talk of a New Year!" said Toby, mournfully. "I can bear up as well as another man at most times; better than a good many, for I am as strong as a lion, and all men an't; but supposing it should really be that we have no right to a New Year—supposing we really *are* intruding——"

"Why, father, father!" said the pleasant voice again.

Toby heard it this time; started; stopped; and shortening his sight, which had been directed a long way off as seeking the enlightenment in the very heart of the approaching year, found himself face to face with his own child, and looking close into her eyes.

Bright eyes they were. Eyes that would bear a world of looking in, before their depth was fathomed. Dark eyes, that reflected back the eyes which searched them; not flashingly, or at the owner's will, but with a clear, calm, honest, patient radiance, claiming kindred with that light which Heaven called into being. Eyes that were beautiful and true, and beaming with Hope. With Hope so young and fresh; with Hope so buoyant, vigorous, and bright, despite the twenty years of work and poverty on which they had looked; that they became a voice to Trotty Veck, and said: "I think we have some business here—a little!"

Trotty kissed the lips belonging to the eyes, and squeezed the blooming face between his hands.

"Why, Pet," said Trotty. "What's to do? I didn't expect you to-day, Meg."

"Neither did I expect to come, father," cried the girl, nodding her head and smiling as she spoke. "But here I am! And not alone; not alone!"

"Why you don't mean to say," observed Trotty, looking curiously at a covered basket which she carried in her hand, "that you——"

"Smell it, father dear," said Meg. "Only smell it!"

Trotty was going to lift up the cover at once, in a great hurry, when she gaily interposed her hand.

"No, no, no," said Meg, with the glee of a child. "Lengthen it out a little. Let me just lift up the corner; just the lit-tle ti-ny cor-ner, you know," said Meg, suiting the action to the word with the utmost gentleness, and speaking very softly, as if she were afraid of being overheard by something inside the basket; "there. Now. What's that?"

Toby took the shortest possible sniff at the edge of the basket, and cried out in a rapture:

"Why, it's hot!"

"It's burning hot!" cried Meg. "Ha, ha, ha! It's scalding hot!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Toby, with a sort of kick. "It's scalding hot!"

"But what is it, father?" said Meg. "Come. You haven't guessed what it is. And you must guess what it is. I can't think

of taking it out, till you guess what it is. Don't be in such a hurry! Wait a minute! A little bit more of the cover. Now guess!"

Meg was in a perfect fright lest he should guess right too soon; shrinking away, as she held the basket towards him; curling up her pretty shoulders; stopping her ear with her hand, as if by so doing she could keep the right word out of Toby's lips; and laughing softly the whole time.

Meanwhile Toby, putting a hand on each knee, bent down his nose to the basket, and took a long inspiration at the lid; the grin upon his withered face expanding in the process, as if he were inhaling laughing gas.

"Ah! It's very nice," said Toby. "It an't—I suppose it an't Polonies?"

"No, no, no!" cried Meg, delighted. "Nothing like Polonies!"

"No," said Toby, after another sniff. "It's—it's mellower than Polonies. It's very nice. It improves every moment. It's too decided for Trotters. An't it?"

Meg was in an ecstasy. He could not have gone wider of the mark than Trotters—except Polonies.

"Liver?" said Toby, communing with himself. "No. There's a mildness about it that don't answer to liver. Pettitoes? No. It an't faint enough for pettitoes. It wants the stringiness of Cocks' heads. And I know it an't sausages. I'll tell you what it is. It's chitterlings!"

"No, it an't!" cried Meg, in a burst of delight. "No, it an't!"

"Why, what am I a-thinking of!" said Toby, suddenly recovering a position as near the perpendicular as it was possible for him to assume. "I shall forget my own name next. It's tripe!"

Tripe it was; and Meg, in high joy, protested he should say, in half a minute more, it was the best tripe ever stewed.

"And so," said Meg, busying herself exultingly with the basket, "I'll lay the cloth at once, father; for I have brought the tripe in a basin, and tied the basin up in a pocket-handkerchief; and if I like to be proud for once, and spread that for a cloth, and call it a cloth, there's no law to prevent me; is there, father?"

"Not that I know of, my dear," said Toby. "But they're always a-bringing up some new law or other."

"And according to what I was reading you in the paper the other day, father; what the Judge said, you know; we poor people are supposed to know them all. Ha, ha! What a mistake! My goodness me, how clever they think us!"

"Yes, my dear," said Trotty; "and they'd be very fond of any one of us that *did* know 'em all. He'd grow fat upon the work he'd get, that man, and be popular with the gentlefolks in his neighbourhood. Very much so!"

"He'd eat his dinner with an appetite, whoever he was, if it smelt like this," said Meg, cheerfully. "Make haste, for

there's a hot potato besides, and half a pint of fresh-drawn beer in a bottle. Where will you dine, father? On the Post, or on the Steps? Dear, dear, how grand we are. Two places to choose from!"

"The steps to-day, my Pet," said Trotty. "Steps in dry weather. Post in wet. There's a greater conveniency in the steps at all times, because of the sitting down; but they're rheumatic in the damp."

"Then here," said Meg, clapping her hands, after a moment's bustle; "here it is, all ready! And beautiful it looks! Come, father. Come!"

Since his discovery of the contents of the basket, Trotty had been standing looking at her—and had been speaking too—in an abstracted manner, which showed that though she was the object of his thoughts and eyes, to the exclusion even of tripe, he neither saw nor thought about her as she was at that moment, but had before him some imaginary rough sketch or drama of her future life. Roused, now, by her cheerful summons, he shook off a melancholy shake of the head which was just coming upon him, and trotted to her side. As he was stooping to sit down, the Chimes rang.

"Amen!" said Trotty, pulling off his hat and looking up towards them.

"Amen to the Bells, father?" cried Meg.

"They broke in like a grace, my dear," said Trotty, taking his seat. "They'd say a good one, I am sure, if they could.

Many's the kind thing they say to me."

"The Bells do, father?" laughed Meg, as she set the basin, and a knife and fork, before him. "Well!"

"Seem to, my Pet," said Trotty, falling to with great vigour. "And where's the difference? If I hear 'em, what does it matter whether they speak it or not? Why bless you, my dear," said Toby, pointing at the tower with his fork, and becoming more animated under the influence of dinner, "how often have I heard them bells say, 'Toby Veck, Toby Veck, keep a good heart, Toby! Toby Veck, Toby Veck, keep a good heart, Toby!' A million times? More!"

"Well, I never!" cried Meg.

She had, though—over and over again. For it was Toby's constant topic.

"When things is very bad," said Trotty; "very bad indeed, I mean; almost at the worst; then it's 'Toby Veck, Toby Veck, job coming soon, Toby! Toby Veck, Toby Veck, job coming soon, Toby!' That way."

"And it comes—at last, father," said Meg, with a touch of sadness in her pleasant voice.

"Always," answered the unconscious Toby. "Never fails."

While this discourse was holding, Trotty made no pause in his attack upon the savoury meat before him, but cut and ate, and cut and drank, and cut and chewed, and dodged about, from tripe to hot potato, and from hot potato back again to tripe, with an unctuous and unflagging relish. But happening

now to look all round the street—in case anybody should be beckoning from any door or window for a porter—his eyes, in coming back again, encountered Meg: sitting opposite to him, with her arms folded: and only busy in watching his progress with a smile of happiness.

"Why, Lord forgive me!" said Trotty, dropping his knife and fork. "My dove! Meg! why didn't you tell me what a beast I was?"

"Father?"

"Sitting here," said Trotty, in a penitent explanation, "cramming, and stuffing, and gorging myself; and you before me there, never so much as breaking your precious fast, nor wanting to, when——"

"But I have broken it, father," interposed his daughter, laughing, "all to bits. I have had my dinner."

"Nonsense," said Trotty. "Two dinners in one day! It an't possible! You might as well tell me that two New Year's Days will come together, or that I have had a gold head all my life, and never changed it."

"I have had my dinner, father, for all that," said Meg, coming nearer to him. "And if you'll go on with yours, I'll tell you how and where; and how your dinner came to be brought; and—and something else besides."

Toby still appeared incredulous; but she looked into his face with her clear eyes, and laying her hand upon his shoulder, motioned him to go on while the meat was hot. So Trotty

took up his knife and fork again, and went to work. But much more slowly than before, and shaking his head, as if he were not at all pleased with himself.

"I had my dinner, father," said Meg, after a little hesitation, "with—with Richard. His dinner-time was early; and as he brought his dinner with him when he came to see me, we—we had it together, father."

Trotty took a little beer, and smacked his lips. Then he said, "Oh!"—because she waited.

"And Richard says, father—" Meg resumed. Then stopped.

"What does Richard say, Meg?" asked Toby.

"Richard says, father—" Another stoppage.

"Richard's a long time saying it," said Toby.

"He says then, father," Meg continued, lifting up her eyes at last, and speaking in a tremble, but quite plainly; "another year is nearly gone, and where is the use of waiting on from year to year, when it is so unlikely we shall ever be better off than we are now? He says we are poor now, father, and we shall be poor then, but we are young now, and years will make us old before we know it. He says that if we wait: people in our condition: until we see our way quite clearly, the way will be a narrow one indeed—the common way—the Grave, father."

A bolder man than Trotty Veck must needs have drawn upon his boldness largely, to deny it. Trotty held his peace.

"And how hard, father, to grow old, and die, and think we

might have cheered and helped each other! How hard in all our lives to love each other; and to grieve, apart, to see each other working, changing, growing old and grey. Even if I got the better of it, and forgot him (which I never could), oh father dear, how hard to have a heart so full as mine is now, and live to have it slowly drained out every drop, without the recollection of one happy moment of a woman's life, to stay behind and comfort me, and make me better!"

Trotty sat quite still. Meg dried her eyes, and said more gaily: that is to say, with here a laugh, and there a sob, and here a laugh and sob together:

"So Richard says, father; as his work was yesterday made certain for some time to come, and as I love him, and have loved him full three years—ah! longer than that, if he knew it!—will I marry him on New Year's Day; the best and happiest day, he says, in the whole year, and one that is almost sure to bring good fortune with it. It's a short notice, father—isn't it? —but I haven't my fortune to be settled, or my wedding dresses to be made, like the great ladies, father, have I? And he said so much, and said it in his way; so strong and earnest, and all the time so kind and gentle; that I said I'd come and talk to you, father. And as they paid the money for that work of mine this morning (unexpectedly, I am sure!) and as you have fared very poorly for a whole week, and as I couldn't help wishing there should be something to make this day a sort of holiday to you as well as a dear and happy day to me, father, I made a little

treat and brought it to surprise you."

"And see how he leaves it cooling on the step," said another voice.

It was the voice of this same Richard, who had come upon them unobserved, and stood before the father and daughter; looking down upon them with a face as glowing as the iron on which his stout sledge-hammer daily rung. A handsome, well-made, powerful youngster he was; with eyes that sparkled like the red-hot droppings from a furnace fire; black hair that curled about his swarthy temples rarely; and a smile—a smile that bore out Meg's eulogium on his style of conversation.

"See how he leaves it cooling on the step!" said Richard. "Meg don't know what he likes. Not she!"

Trotty, all action and enthusiasm, immediately reached up his hand to Richard, and was going to address him in a great hurry, when the house-door opened without any warning, and a footman very nearly put his foot into the tripe.

"Out of the vays here, will you! You must always go and be a-settin on our steps, must you! You can't go and give a turn to none of the neighbours never, can't you! *Will* you clear the road, or won't you?"

Strictly speaking, the last question was irrelevant, as they had already done it.

"What's the matter, what's the matter!" said the gentleman for whom the door was opened; coming out of the house at that kind of light-heavy pace—that peculiar compromise

between a walk and a jog-trot—with which a gentleman upon the smooth down-hill of life, wearing creaking boots, a watch-chain, and clean linen, *may* come out of his house: not only without any abatement of his dignity, but with an expression of having important and wealthy engagements elsewhere. "What's the matter! What's the matter!"

"You're always a-being begged, and prayed, upon your bended knees you are," said the footman with great emphasis to Trotty Veck, "to let our door-steps be. Why don't you let 'em be? CAN'T you let 'em be?"

"There! That'll do, that'll do!" said the gentleman. "Halloa there! Porter!" beckoning with his head to Trotty Veck. "Come here. What's that? Your dinner?"

"Yes, sir," said Trotty, leaving it behind him in a corner.

"Don't leave it there," exclaimed the gentleman. "Bring it here, bring it here. So! This is your dinner, is it?"

"Yes, sir," repeated Trotty, looking with a fixed eye and a watery mouth, at the piece of tripe he had reserved for a last delicious tit-bit; which the gentleman was now turning over and over on the end of the fork.

Two other gentlemen had come out with him. One was a low-spirited gentleman of middle age, of a meagre habit, and a disconsolate face; who kept his hands continually in the pockets of his scanty pepper-and-salt trousers, very large and dog's-eared from that custom; and was not particularly well brushed or washed. The other, a full-sized, sleek, well-conditioned gentle-

man, in a blue coat with bright buttons, and a white cravat. This gentleman had a very red face, as if an undue proportion of the blood in his body were squeezed up into his head; which perhaps accounted for his having also the appearance of being rather cold about the heart.

He who had Toby's meat upon the fork, called to the first one by the name of Filer; and they both drew near together. Mr. Filer being exceedingly short-sighted, was obliged to go so close to the remnant of Toby's dinner before he could make out what it was, that Toby's heart leaped up into his mouth. But Mr. Filer didn't eat it.

"This is a description of animal food, Alderman," said Filer, making little punches in it with a pencil-case, "commonly known to the labouring population of this country, by the name of tripe."

The Alderman laughed, and winked; for he was a merry fellow, Alderman Cute. Oh, and a sly fellow, too! A knowing fellow. Up to everything. Not to be imposed upon. Deep in the people's hearts! He knew them, Cute did. I believe you!

"But who eats tripe?" said Mr. Filer, looking round. "Tripe is without an exception the least economical, and the most wasteful article of consumption that the markets of this country can by possibility produce. The loss upon a pound of tripe has been found to be, in the boiling, seven-eighths of a fifth more than the loss upon a pound of any other animal substance whatever. Tripe is more expensive, properly understood,

than the hothouse pine-apple. Taking into account the number of animals slaughtered yearly within the bills of mortality alone; and forming a low estimate of the quantity of tripe which the carcases of those animals, reasonably well butchered, would yield; I find that the waste on that amount of tripe, if boiled, would victual a garrison of five hundred men for five months of thirty-one days each, and a February over. The Waste, the Waste!"

Trotty stood aghast, and his legs shook under him. He seemed to have starved a garrison of five hundred men with his own hand.

"Who eats tripe?" said Mr. Filer, warmly. "Who eats tripe?" Trotty made a miserable bow.

"You do, do you?" said Mr. Filer. "Then I'll tell you something. You snatch your tripe, my friend, out of the mouths of widows and orphans."

"I hope not, sir," said Trotty, faintly. "I'd sooner die of want!"

"Divide the amount of tripe before-mentioned, Alderman," said Mr. Filer, "by the estimated number of existing widows and orphans, and the result will be one pennyweight of tripe to each. Not a grain is left for that man. Consequently, he's a robber."

Trotty was so shocked, that it gave him no concern to see the Alderman finish the tripe himself. It was a relief to get rid of it, anyhow.

"And what do you say?" asked the Alderman, jocosely, of the red-faced gentleman in the blue coat. "You have heard friend Filer. What do *you* say?"

"What's it possible to say?" returned the gentleman. "What *is* to be said? Who can take any interest in a fellow like this," meaning Trotty; "in such degenerate times as these? Look at him. What an object! The good old times, the grand old times, the great old times! *Those* were the times for a bold peasantry, and all that sort of thing. Those were the times for every sort of thing, in fact. There's nothing now-a-days. Ah!" sighed the red-faced gentleman. "The good old times, the good old times!"

The gentleman didn't specify what particular times he alluded to; nor did he say whether he objected to the present times, from a disinterested consciousness that they had done nothing very remarkable in producing himself.

"The good old times, the good old times," repeated the gentleman. "What times they were! They were the only times. It's of no use talking about any other times, or discussing what the people are in *these* times. You don't call these, times, do you? I don't. Look into Strutt's Costumes, and see what a Porter used to be, in any of the good old English reigns."

"He hadn't, in his very best circumstances, a shirt to his back, or a stocking to his foot; and there was scarcely a vegetable in all England for him to put into his mouth," said Mr. Filer. "I can prove it, by tables."

But still the red-faced gentleman extolled the good old times, the grand old times, the great old times. No matter what anybody else said, he still went turning round and round in one set form of words concerning them; as a poor squirrel turns and turns in its revolving cage; touching the mechanism, and trick of which, it has probably quite as distinct perceptions, as ever this red-faced gentleman had of his deceased Millennium.

It is possible that poor Trotty's faith in these very vague Old Times was not entirely destroyed, for he felt vague enough, at that moment. One thing, however, was plain to him, in the midst of his distress; to wit, that however these gentlemen might differ in details, his misgivings of that morning, and of many other mornings, were well founded. "No, no. We can't go right or do right," thought Trotty in despair. "There is no good in us. We are born bad!"

But Trotty had a father's heart within him; which had somehow got into his breast in spite of this decree; and he could not bear that Meg, in the blush of her brief joy, should have her fortune read by these wise gentlemen. "God help her," thought poor Trotty. "She will know it soon enough."

He anxiously signed, therefore, to the young smith, to take her away. But he was so busy, talking to her softly at a little distance, that he only became conscious of this desire, simultaneously with Alderman Cute. Now, the Alderman had not yet had his say, but *he* was a philosopher, too—practical, though! Oh, very practical—and, as he had no idea of losing

any portion of his audience, he cried, "Stop!"

"Now, you know," said the Alderman, addressing his two friends, with a self-complacent smile upon his face which was habitual to him, "I am a plain man, and a practical man; and I go to work in a plain practical way. That's my way. There is not the least mystery or difficulty in dealing with this sort of people if you only understand 'em, and can talk to 'em in their own manner. Now, you Porter! Don't you ever tell me, or anybody else, my friend, that you haven't always enough to eat, and of the best; because I know better. I have tasted your tripe, you know, and you can't 'chaff' me. You understand what 'chaff' means, eh? That's the right word, isn't it? Ha, ha, ha! Lord bless you," said the Alderman, turning to his friends again, "it's the easiest thing on earth to deal with this sort of people, if you understand 'em."

Famous man for the common people, Alderman Cute! Never out of temper with them! Easy, affable, joking, knowing gentleman!

"You see, my friend," pursued the Alderman, "there's a great deal of nonsense talked about Want—'hard up,' you know; that's the phrase, isn't it? Ha! ha! ha!—and I intend to Put it Down. There's a certain amount of cant in vogue about Starvation, and I mean to Put it Down. That's all! Lord bless you," said the Alderman, turning to his friends again, "you may Put Down anything among this sort of people, if you only know the way to set about it."

Trotty took Meg's hand and drew it through his arm. He didn't seem to know what he was doing though.

"Your daughter, eh?" said the Alderman, chucking her familiarly under the chin.

Always affable with the working classes, Alderman Cute! Knew what pleased them! Not a bit of pride!

"Where's her mother?" asked that worthy gentleman.

"Dead," said Toby. "Her mother got up linen; and was called to Heaven when she was born."

"Not to get up linen *there*, I suppose," remarked the Alderman pleasantly.

Toby might or might not have been able to separate his wife in Heaven from her old pursuits. But query: If Mrs. Alderman Cute had gone to Heaven, would Mr. Alderman Cute have pictured her as holding any state or station there?

"And you're making love to her, are you?" said Cute to the young smith.

"Yes," returned Richard quickly, for he was nettled by the question. "And we are going to be married on New Year's Day."

"What do you mean!" cried Filer sharply. "Married!"

"Why, yes, we're thinking of it, Master," said Richard. "We're rather in a hurry, you see, in case it should be Put Down first."

"Ah!" cried Filer, with a groan. "Put *that* down, indeed, Alderman, and you'll do something. Married! Married!!

The ignorance of the first principles of political economy on the part of these people; their improvidence; their wickedness; is, by Heavens! enough to—Now look at that couple, will you!"

Well? They were worth looking at. And marriage seemed as reasonable and fair a deed as they need have in contemplation.

"A man may live to be as old as Methuselah," said Mr. Filer, "and may labour all his life for the benefit of such people as those; and may heap up facts on figures, facts on figures, facts on figures, mountains high and dry; and he can no more hope to persuade 'em that they have no right or business to be married, than he can hope to persuade 'em that they have no earthly right or business to be born. And *that* we know they haven't. We reduced it to a mathematical certainty long ago!"

Alderman Cute was mightily diverted, and laid his right forefinger on the side of his nose, as much as to say to both his friends, "Observe me, will you! Keep your eye on the practical man!"—and called Meg to him.

"Come here, my girl!" said Alderman Cute.

The young blood of her lover had been mounting, wrathfully, within the last few minutes; and he was indisposed to let her come. But, setting a constraint upon himself, he came forward with a stride as Meg approached, and stood beside her. Trotty kept her hand within his arm still, but looked from face to face as wildly as a sleeper in a dream.

"Now, I'm going to give you a word or two of good

advice, my girl," said the Alderman, in his nice easy way. "It's my place to give advice, you know, because I'm a Justice. You know I'm a Justice, don't you?"

Meg timidly said, "Yes." But everybody knew Alderman Cute was a Justice! O dear, so active a Justice always! Who such a mote of brightness in the public eye, as Cute!

"You are going to be married, you say," pursued the Alderman. "Very unbecoming and indelicate in one of your sex! But never mind that. After you are married, you'll quarrel with your husband and come to be a distressed wife. You may think not; but you will, because I tell you so. Now, I give you fair warning, that I have made up my mind to Put distressed wives Down. So, don't be brought before me. You'll have children —boys. These boys will grow up bad, of course, and run wild in the streets, without shoes and stockings. Mind, my young friend! I'll convict 'em summarily, every one, for I am determined to Put boys without shoes and stockings Down. Perhaps your husband will die young (most likely) and leave you with a baby. Then you'll be turned out of doors, and wander up and down the streets. Now, don't wander near me, my dear, for I am resolved to Put all wandering mothers Down. All young mothers, of all sorts and kinds, it's my determination to Put Down. Don't think to plead illness as an excuse with me; or babies as an excuse with me; for all sick persons and young children (I hope you know the church-service, but I'm afraid not) I am determined to Put Down. And if you attempt,

desperately, and ungratefully, and impiously, and fraudulently attempt, to drown yourself, or hang yourself, I'll have no pity for you, for I have made up my mind to Put all suicide Down! If there is one thing," said the Alderman, with his self-satisfied smile, "on which I can be said to have made up my mind more than on another, it is to Put suicide Down. So don't try it on. That's the phrase, isn't it? Ha, ha! now we understand each other."

Toby knew not whether to be agonised or glad, to see that Meg had turned a deadly white, and dropped her lover's hand.

"And as for you, you dull dog," said the Alderman, turning with even increased cheerfulness and urbanity to the young smith, "what are you thinking of being married for? What do you want to be married for, you silly fellow? If I was a fine, young, strapping chap like you, I should be ashamed of being milksop enough to pin myself to a woman's apron-strings! Why, she'll be an old woman before you're a middle-aged man! And a pretty figure you'll cut then, with a draggle-tailed wife and a crowd of squalling children crying after you wherever you go!"

O, he knew how to banter the common people, Alderman Cute!

"There! Go along with you," said the Alderman, "and repent. Don't make such a fool of yourself as to get married on New Year's Day. You'll think very differently of it, long before next New Year's Day: a trim young fellow like you,

with all the girls looking after you. There! Go along with you!"

They went along. Not arm in arm, or hand in hand, or interchanging bright glances; but, she in tears; he, gloomy and down-looking. Were these the hearts that had so lately made old Toby's leap up from its faintness? No, no. The Alderman (a blessing on his head!) had Put *them* Down.

"As you happen to be here," said the Alderman to Toby, "you shall carry a letter for me. Can you be quick? You're an old man."

Toby, who had been looking after Meg, quite stupidly, made shift to murmur out that he was very quick, and very strong.

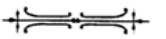
"How old are you?" inquired the Alderman.

"I'm over sixty, sir," said Toby.

"O! This man's a great deal past the average age, you know," cried Mr. Filer, breaking in as if his patience would bear some trying, but this really was carrying matters a little too far.

"I feel I'm intruding, sir," said Toby. "I—I misdoubted it this morning. Oh dear me!"

The Alderman cut him short by giving him the letter from his pocket. Toby would have got a shilling too; but Mr. Filer clearly showing that in that case he would rob a certain given number of persons of ninepence-halfpenny a-piece, he only got sixpence; and thought himself very well off to get that.



Then the Alderman gave an arm to each of his friends, and walked off in high feather; but, he immediately came hurrying back alone, as if he had forgotten something.

‘Porter!’ said the Alderman.

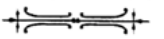
‘Sir!’ said Toby.

‘Take care of that daughter of yours. She’s much too handsome.’

‘Even her good looks are stolen from somebody or other, I suppose,’ thought Toby, looking at the sixpence in his hand, and thinking of the tripe. ‘She’s been and robbed five hundred ladies of a bloom a-piece, I shouldn’t wonder. It’s very dreadful!’

‘She’s much too handsome, my man,’ repeated the Alderman. ‘The chances are, that she’ll come to no good, I clearly see. Observe what I say. Take care of her!’ With which, he hurried off again.

‘Wrong every way. Wrong every way!’ said Trotty, clasping his hands. ‘Born bad. No business here!’



The Chimes came clashing in upon him as he said the words. Full, loud,

and sounding—but with no encouragement. No, not a drop.

'The tune's changed,' cried the old man, as he listened. 'There's not a

word of all that fancy in it. Why should there be? I have no business

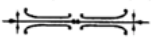
with the New Year nor with the old one neither. Let me die!'

Still the Bells, pealing forth their changes, made the very air spin. Put

'em down, Put 'em down! Good old Times, Good old Times! Facts and

Figures, Facts and Figures! Put 'em down, Put 'em down! If they said anything they said this, until the brain of Toby reeled.

He pressed his bewildered head between his hands, as if to keep it from splitting asunder. A well-timed action, as it happened; for finding the letter in one of them, and being by that means reminded of his charge, he fell, mechanically, into his usual trot, and trotted off.



CHAPTER 2. THE SECOND QUARTER

The letter Toby had received from Alderman Cute, was addressed to a great man in the great district of the town. The greatest district of the town. It must have been the greatest district of the town, because it was commonly called ‘the world’ by

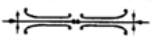
its inhabitants. The letter positively seemed heavier in Toby's hand, than another letter. Not because the Alderman had sealed it with a very large coat of arms and no end of wax, but because of the weighty name on the superscription, and the ponderous amount of gold and silver with which it was associated.

'How different from us!' thought Toby, in all simplicity and earnestness, as he looked at the direction. 'Divide the lively turtles in the bills of

mortality, by the number of gentlefolks able to buy 'em; and whose share does he take but his own! As to snatching tripe from anybody's mouth— he'd scorn it!' With the involuntary homage due to such an exalted character, Toby

interposed a corner of his apron between the letter and his fingers.

'His children,' said Trotty, and a mist rose before his eyes; 'his daughters—Gentlemen may win their hearts and marry them; they may be happy wives and mothers; they may be handsome like my darling M-e-'. He couldn't finish the name. The final letter swelled in his throat, to the size of the whole alphabet.



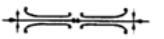
‘Never mind,’ thought Trotty. ‘I know what I mean. That’s more than enough for me.’ And with this consolatory rumination, trotted on.

It was a hard frost, that day. The air was bracing, crisp, and clear. The wintry sun, though powerless for warmth, looked brightly down upon the ice it was too weak to melt, and set a radiant glory there. At other times, Trotty might have learned a poor man’s lesson from the wintry sun; but, he was past that, now.

The Year was Old, that day. The patient Year had lived through the reproaches and misuses of its slanderers, and faithfully performed its

work. Spring, summer, autumn, winter. It had laboured through the

destined round, and now laid down its weary head to die. Shut out from



hope, high impulse, active happiness, itself, but active messenger of

many joys to others, it made appeal in its decline to have its toiling days

and patient hours remembered, and to die in peace. Trotty might have

read a poor man's allegory in the fading year; but he was past that, now.

And only he? Or has the like appeal been ever made, by seventy years at

once upon an English labourer's head, and made in vain!

The streets were full of motion, and the shops were decked out

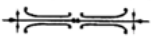
gaily. The New Year, like an Infant Heir to the whole world, was waited

for, with welcomes, presents, and rejoicings. There were books and toys

for the New Year, glittering trinkets for the New Year, dresses for the

New Year, schemes of fortune for the New Year; new inventions to

beguile it. Its life was parcelled out in almanacks and pocket-books; the



coming of its moons, and stars, and tides, was known beforehand to the

moment; all the workings of its seasons in their days and nights, were

calculated with as much precision as Mr. Filer could work sums in men

and women.

The New Year, the New Year. Everywhere the New Year! The Old Year

was already looked upon as dead; and its effects were selling cheap, like

some drowned mariner's aboardship. Its patterns were Last Year's, and

going at a sacrifice, before its breath was gone. Its treasures were mere

dirt, beside the riches of its unborn successor!

Trotty had no portion, to his thinking, in the New Year or the Old.

'Put 'em down, Put 'em down! Facts and Figures, Facts and

Figures! Good old Times, Good old Times! Put 'em down, Put 'em

down!'—his trot went to that measure, and would fit itself to nothing

else.

But, even that one, melancholy as it was, brought him, in due time, to the

end of his journey. To the mansion of Sir Joseph Bowley, Member of

Parliament.

The door was opened by a Porter. Such a Porter! Not of Toby's

order. Quite another thing. His place was the ticket though; not Toby's.[26]

This Porter underwent some hard panting before he could speak; having

breathed himself by coming incautiously out of his chair, without first

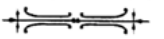
taking time to think about it and compose his mind. When he had found

his voice—which it took him a long time to do, for it was a long way off,

and hidden under a load of meat—he said in a fat whisper,

'Who's it from?'

Toby told him.



‘You’re to take it in, yourself,’ said the Porter, pointing to a room at the

end of a long passage, opening from the hall. ‘Everything goes straight

in, on this day of the year. You’re not a bit too soon; for the carriage is at

the door now, and they have only come to town for a couple of hours, a’

purpose.’

Toby wiped his feet (which were quite dry already) with great care, and

took the way pointed out to him; observing as he went that it was an

awfully grand house, but hushed and covered up, as if the family were in

the country. Knocking at the room-door, he was told to enter from

within; and doing so found himself in a spacious library, where, at a table

strewn with files and papers, were a stately lady in a bonnet; and a not

very stately gentleman in black who wrote from her dictation; while

another, and an older, and a much statelier gentleman, whose hat and

cane were on the table, walked up and down, with one hand in his breast,

and looked complacently from time to time at his own picture—a full

length; a very full length—hanging over the fireplace.

‘What is this?’ said the last-named gentleman. ‘Mr. Fish, will you have

the goodness to attend?’

Mr. Fish begged pardon, and taking the letter from Toby, handed it, with

great respect.

‘From Alderman Cute, Sir Joseph.’

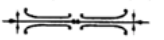
‘Is this all? Have you nothing else, Porter?’ inquired Sir Joseph.

Toby replied in the negative.

‘You have no bill or demand upon me—my name is Bowley, Sir Joseph

Bowley—of any kind from anybody, have you?’ said Sir Joseph. ‘If you[27]

have, present it. There is a cheque-book by the side of Mr. Fish. I allow



nothing to be carried into the New Year. Every description of account is

settled in this house at the close of the old one. So that if death was to—

to—'

'To cut,' suggested Mr. Fish.

'To sever, sir,' returned Sir Joseph, with great asperity, 'the cord of

existence—my affairs would be found, I hope, in a state of preparation.'

'My dear Sir Joseph!' said the lady, who was greatly younger than the

gentleman. 'How shocking!'

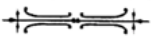
'My lady Bowley,' returned Sir Joseph, floundering now and then, as in

the great depth of his observations, 'at this season of the year we should

think of—of—ourselves. We should look into our—our accounts. We

should feel that every return of so eventful a period in human

transactions, involves a matter of deep moment between a man and his—



and his banker.'

Sir Joseph delivered these words as if he felt the full morality of what he

was saying; and desired that even Trotty should have an opportunity of

being improved by such discourse. Possibly he had this end before him

in still forbearing to break the seal of the letter, and in telling Trotty to

wait where he was, a minute.

'You were desiring Mr. Fish to say, my lady—' observed Sir Joseph.

'Mr. Fish has said that, I believe,' returned his lady, glancing at the

letter. 'But, upon my word, Sir Joseph, I don't think I can let it go after

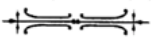
all. It is so very dear.'

'What is dear?' inquired Sir Joseph.

'That Charity, my love. They only allow two votes for a subscription of

five pounds. Really monstrous!'

'My lady Bowley,' returned Sir Joseph, 'you surprise me. Is the luxury of



feeling in proportion to the number of votes; or is it, to a rightly

constituted mind, in proportion to the number of applicants, and the

wholesome state of mind to which their canvassing reduces them? Is[28]

there no excitement of the purest kind in having two votes to dispose of

among fifty people?'

'Not to me, I acknowledge,' replied the lady. 'It bores one. Besides, one

can't oblige one's acquaintance. But you are the Poor Man's Friend, you

know, Sir Joseph. You think otherwise.'

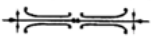
'I *am* the Poor Man's Friend,' observed Sir Joseph, glancing at the poor

man present. 'As such I may be taunted. As such I have been

taunted. But I ask no other title.'

'Bless him for a noble gentleman!' thought Trotty.

'I don't agree with Cute here, for instance,' said Sir Joseph, holding out



the letter. ‘I don’t agree with the Filer party. I don’t agree with any

party. My friend the Poor Man, has no business with anything of that

sort, and nothing of that sort has any business with him. My friend the

Poor Man, in my district, is my business. No man or body of men has

any right to interfere between my friend and me. That is the ground I

take. I assume a—a paternal character towards my friend. I say, “My

good fellow, I will treat you paternally.”’

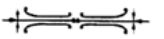
Toby listened with great gravity, and began to feel more comfortable.

‘Your only business, my good fellow,’ pursued Sir Joseph, looking

abstractedly at Toby; ‘your only business in life is with me. You needn’t

trouble yourself to think about anything. I will think for you; I know

what is good for you; I am your perpetual parent. Such is the



dispensation of an all-wise Providence! Now, the design of your creation

is—not that you should swill, and guzzle, and associate your enjoyments,

brutally, with food; Toby thought remorsefully of the tripe; 'but that you

should feel the Dignity of Labour. Go forth erect into the cheerful

morning air, and—and stop there. Live hard and temperately, be

respectful, exercise your self-denial, bring up your family on next to

nothing, pay your rent as regularly as the clock strikes, be punctual in

your dealings (I set you a good example; you will find Mr. Fish, my

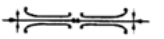
confidential secretary, with a cash-box before him at all times); and you

may trust to me to be your Friend and Father.'[29]

'Nice children, indeed, Sir Joseph!' said the lady, with a

shudder. 'Rheumatisms, and fevers, and crooked legs, and asthmas, and

all kinds of horrors!'



‘My lady,’ returned Sir Joseph, with solemnity, ‘not the less am I the

Poor Man’s Friend and Father. Not the less shall he receive

encouragement at my hands. Every quarter-day he will be put in

communication with Mr. Fish. Every New Year’s Day, myself and friends

will drink his health. Once every year, myself and friends will address

him with the deepest feeling. Once in his life, he may even perhaps

receive; in public, in the presence of the gentry; a Trifle from a

Friend. And when, upheld no more by these stimulants, and the Dignity

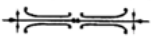
of Labour, he sinks into his comfortable grave, then, my lady’—here Sir

Joseph blew his nose—‘I will be a Friend and a Father —on the same

terms—to his children.’

Toby was greatly moved.

‘O! You have a thankful family, Sir Joseph!’ cried his wife.



‘My lady,’ said Sir Joseph, quite majestically, ‘Ingratitude is known to be

the sin of that class. I expect no other return.’

‘Ah! Born bad!’ thought Toby. ‘Nothing melts us.’

‘What man can do, *I* do,’ pursued Sir Joseph. ‘I do my duty as the Poor

Man’s Friend and Father; and I endeavour to educate his mind, by

inculcating on all occasions the one great moral lesson which that class

requires. That is, entire Dependence on myself. They have no business

whatever with—with themselves. If wicked and designing persons tell

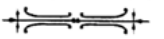
them otherwise, and they become impatient and discontented, and are

guilty of insubordinate conduct and black-hearted ingratitude; which is

undoubtedly the case; I am their Friend and Father still. It is so

Ordained. It is in the nature of things.’

With that great sentiment, he opened the Alderman’s letter; and read it.



‘Very polite and attentive, I am sure!’ exclaimed Sir Joseph. ‘My lady,

the Alderman is so obliging as to remind me that he has had “the

distinguished honour”—he is very good—of meeting me at the house of

our mutual friend Deedles, the banker; and he does me the favour to

inquire whether it will be agreeable to me to have Will Fern put down.’

‘*Most* agreeable!’ replied my Lady Bowley. ‘The worst man among

them! He has been committing a robbery, I hope?’

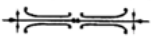
‘Why no,’ said Sir Joseph’, referring to the letter. ‘Not quite. Very

near. Not quite. He came up to London, it seems, to look for

employment (trying to better himself—that’s his story), and being found

at night asleep in a shed, was taken into custody, and carried next

morning before the Alderman. The Alderman observes (very properly)



that he is determined to put this sort of thing down; and that if it will be

agreeable to me to have Will Fern put down, he will be happy to begin

with him.'

'Let him be made an example of, by all means,' returned the lady. 'Last

winter, when I introduced pinking and eyelet-holing among the men and

boys in the village, as a nice evening employment, and had the lines,

O let us love our occupations,

Bless the squire and his relations,

Live upon our daily rations,

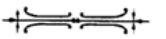
And always know our proper stations,

set to music on the new system, for them to sing the while; this very

Fern—I see him now—touched that hat of his, and said, "I humbly ask

your pardon, my lady, but *an't* I something different from a great girl?" I

expected it, of course; who can expect anything but insolence and



ingratitude from that class of people! That is not to the purpose,

however. Sir Joseph! Make an example of him!'

'Hem!' coughed Sir Joseph. 'Mr. Fish, if you'll have the goodness to

attend—'

Mr. Fish immediately seized his pen, and wrote from Sir Joseph's

dictation.

'Private. My dear Sir. I am very much indebted to you for your courtesy

in the matter of the man William Fern, of whom, I regret to add, I can

say nothing favourable. I have uniformly considered myself in the light

of his Friend and Father, but have been repaid (a common case, I grieve[31]

to say) with ingratitude, and constant opposition to my plans. He is a

turbulent and rebellious spirit. His character will not bear

investigation. Nothing will persuade him to be happy when he

might. Under these circumstances, it appears to me, I own, that when he

comes before you again (as you informed me he promised to do to-

morrow, pending your inquiries, and I think he may be so far relied

upon), his committal for some short term as a Vagabond, would be a

service to society, and would be a salutary example in a country where—

for the sake of those who are, through good and evil report, the Friends

and Fathers of the Poor, as well as with a view to that, generally

speaking, misguided class themselves—examples are greatly

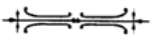
needed. And I am,' and so forth.

'It appears,' remarked Sir Joseph when he had signed this letter, and Mr.

Fish was sealing it, 'as if this were Ordained: really. At the close of the

year, I wind up my account and strike my balance, even with William

Fern!'



Trotty, who had long ago relapsed, and was very low-spirited, stepped

forward with a rueful face to take the letter.

‘With my compliments and thanks,’ said Sir Joseph. ‘Stop!’

‘Stop!’ echoed Mr. Fish.

‘You have heard, perhaps,’ said Sir Joseph, oracularly, ‘certain remarks

into which I have been led respecting the solemn period of time at which

we have arrived, and the duty imposed upon us of settling our affairs,

and being prepared. You have observed that I don’t shelter myself

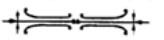
behind my superior standing in society, but that Mr. Fish—that

gentleman—has a cheque-book at his elbow, and is in fact here, to enable

me to turn over a perfectly new leaf, and enter on the epoch before us

with a clean account. Now, my friend, can you lay your hand upon your

heart, and say, that you also have made preparations for a New Year?’



‘I am afraid, sir,’ stammered Trotty, looking meekly at him, ‘that I am a—

a—little behind-hand with the world.’

‘Behind-hand with the world!’ repeated Sir Joseph Bowley, in a tone of

terrible distinctness.[32]

‘I am afraid, sir,’ faltered Trotty, ‘that there’s a matter of ten or twelve

shillings owing to Mrs. Chickenstalker.’

‘To Mrs. Chickenstalker!’ repeated Sir Joseph, in the same tone as

before.

‘A shop, sir,’ exclaimed Toby, ‘in the general line. Also a—a little money

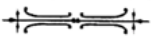
on account of rent. A very little, sir. It oughtn’t to be owing, I know, but

we have been hard put to it, indeed!’

Sir Joseph looked at his lady, and at Mr. Fish, and at Trotty, one after

another, twice all round. He then made a despondent gesture with both

hands at once, as if he gave the thing up altogether.



‘How a man, even among this improvident and impracticable race; an

old man; a man grown grey; can look a New Year in the face, with his

affairs in this condition; how he can lie down on his bed at night, and get

up again in the morning, and—There!’ he said, turning his back on

Trotty. ‘Take the letter. Take the letter!’

‘I heartily wish it was otherwise, sir,’ said Trotty, anxious to excuse

himself. ‘We have been tried very hard.’

Sir Joseph still repeating ‘Take the letter, take the letter!’ and Mr. Fish

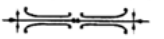
not only saying the same thing, but giving additional force to the request

by motioning the bearer to the door, he had nothing for it but to make

his bow and leave the house. And in the street, poor Trotty pulled his

worn old hat down on his head, to hide the grief he felt at getting no hold

on the New Year, anywhere.



He didn’t even lift his hat to look up at the Bell tower when he came to

the old church on his return. He halted there a moment, from habit: and

knew that it was growing dark, and that the steeple rose above him,

indistinct and faint, in the murky air. He knew, too, that the Chimes

would ring immediately; and that they sounded to his fancy, at such a

time, like voices in the clouds. But he only made the more haste to

deliver the Alderman’s letter, and get out of the way before they began;

for he dreaded to hear them tagging ‘Friends and Fathers, Friends and

Fathers,’ to the burden they had rung out last.[33]

Toby discharged himself of his commission, therefore, with all possible

speed, and set off trotting homeward. But what with his pace, which was

at best an awkward one in the street; and what with his hat, which didn’t

improve it; he trotted against somebody in less than no time, and was

sent staggering out into the road.

‘I beg your pardon, I’m sure!’ said Trotty, pulling up his hat in great

confusion, and between the hat and the torn lining, fixing his head into a

kind of bee-hive. ‘I hope I haven’t hurt you.’

As to hurting anybody, Toby was not such an absolute Samson, but that

he was much more likely to be hurt himself: and indeed, he had flown

out into the road, like a shuttlecock. He had such an opinion of his own

strength, however, that he was in real concern for the other party: and

said again,

‘I hope I haven’t hurt you?’

The man against whom he had run; a sun-browned, sinewy, country-

looking man, with grizzled hair, and a rough chin; stared at him for a

moment, as if he suspected him to be in jest. But, satisfied of his good

faith, he answered:

‘No, friend. You have not hurt me.’

‘Nor the child, I hope?’ said Trotty.

‘Nor the child,’ returned the man. ‘I thank you kindly.’

As he said so, he glanced at a little girl he carried in his arms, asleep: and

shading her face with the long end of the poor handkerchief he wore

about his throat, went slowly on.

The tone in which he said ‘I thank you kindly,’ penetrated Trotty’s

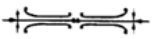
heart. He was so jaded and foot-sore, and so soiled with travel, and

looked about him so forlorn and strange, that it was a comfort to him to

be able to thank any one: no matter for how little. Toby stood gazing

after him as he plodded wearily away, with the child’s arm clinging

round his neck.



At the figure in the worn shoes—now the very shade and ghost of shoes—

rough leather leggings, common frock, and broad slouched hat, Trotty[34]

stood gazing, blind to the whole street. And at the child's arm, clinging

round its neck.

Before he merged into the darkness the traveller stopped; and looking

round, and seeing Trotty standing there yet, seemed undecided whether

to return or go on. After doing first the one and then the other, he came

back, and Trotty went half-way to meet him.

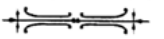
'You can tell me, perhaps,' said the man with a faint smile, 'and if you can

I am sure you will, and I'd rather ask you than another—where Alderman

Cute lives.'

'Close at hand,' replied Toby. 'I'll show you his house with pleasure.'

'I was to have gone to him elsewhere to-morrow,' said the man,



accompanying Toby, 'but I'm uneasy under suspicion, and want to clear

myself, and to be free to go and seek my bread—I don't know where. So,

maybe he'll forgive my going to his house to-night.'

'It's impossible,' cried Toby with a start, 'that your name's Fern!'

'Eh!' cried the other, turning on him in astonishment.

'Fern! Will Fern!' said Trotty.

'That's my name,' replied the other.

'Why then,' said Trotty, seizing him by the arm, and looking cautiously

round, 'for Heaven's sake don't go to him! Don't go to him! He'll put

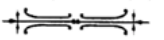
you down as sure as ever you were born. Here! come up this alley, and

I'll tell you what I mean. Don't go to *him*.'

His new acquaintance looked as if he thought him mad; but he bore him

company nevertheless. When they were shrouded from observation,

Trotty told him what he knew, and what character he had received, and



all about it.

The subject of his history listened to it with a calmness that surprised

him. He did not contradict or interrupt it, once. He nodded his head

now and then—more in corroboration of an old and worn-out story, it

appeared, than in refutation of it; and once or twice threw back his hat,

and passed his freckled hand over a brow, where every furrow he had

ploughed seemed to have set its image in little. But he did no more.[35]

'It's true enough in the main,' he said, 'master, I could sift grain from

husk here and there, but let it be as 'tis. What odds? I have gone against

his plans; to my misfortun'. I can't help it; I should do the like to-

morrow. As to character, them gentlefolks will search and search, and

pry and pry, and have it as free from spot or speck in us, afore they'll

help us to a dry good word!—Well! I hope they don't lose good opinion as

easy as we do, or their lives is strict indeed, and hardly worth the

keeping. For myself, master, I never took with that hand'—holding it

before him—'what wasn't my own; and never held it back from work,

however hard, or poorly paid. Whoever can deny it, let him chop it

off! But when work won't maintain me like a human creetur; when my

living is so bad, that I am Hungry, out of doors and in; when I see a

whole working life begin that way, go on that way, and end that way,

without a chance or change; then I say to the gentlefolks "Keep away

from me! Let my cottage be. My doors is dark enough without your

darkening of 'em more. Don't look for me to come up into the Park to

help the show when there's a Birthday, or a fine Speechmaking, or what

not. Act your Plays and Games without me, and be welcome to 'em, and

enjoy 'em. We've nowt to do with one another. I'm best let alone!"'

Seeing that the child in his arms had opened her eyes, and was looking

about her in wonder, he checked himself to say a word or two of foolish

prattle in her ear, and stand her on the ground beside him. Then slowly

winding one of her long tresses round and round his rough forefinger

like a ring, while she hung about his dusty leg, he said to Trotty:

'I'm not a cross-grained man by natu', I believe; and easy satisfied, I'm

sure. I bear no ill-will against none of 'em. I only want to live like one of

the Almighty's creeturs. I can't—I don't—and so there's a pit dug

between me, and them that can and do. There's others like me. You

might tell 'em off by hundreds and by thousands, sooner than by ones.'

Trotty knew he spoke the Truth in this, and shook his head to signify as

much.

‘I’ve got a bad name this way,’ said Fern; ‘and I’m not likely, I’m afeared,

to get a better. ’Tan’t lawful to be out of sorts, and I am out of sorts,

though God knows I’d sooner bear a cheerful spirit if I could. Well! I

don’t know as this Alderman could hurt *me* much by sending me to jail;[36]

but without a friend to speak a word for me, he might do it; and you

see—!’ pointing downward with his finger, at the child.

‘She has a beautiful face,’ said Trotty.

‘Why yes!’ replied the other in a low voice, as he gently turned it up with

both his hands towards his own, and looked upon it steadfastly. ‘I’ve

thought so, many times. I’ve thought so, when my hearth was very cold,

and cupboard very bare. I thought so t’other night, when we were taken

like two thieves. But they—they shouldn't try the little face too often,

should they, Lilian? That's hardly fair upon a man!'

He sunk his voice so low, and gazed upon her with an air so stern and

strange, that Toby, to divert the current of his thoughts, inquired if his

wife were living.

'I never had one,' he returned, shaking his head. 'She's my brother's

child: a orphan. Nine year old, though you'd hardly think it; but she's

tired and worn out now. They'd have taken care on her, the Union—

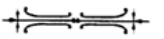
eight-and-twenty mile away from where we live—between four walls (as

they took care of my old father when he couldn't work no more, though

he didn't trouble 'em long); but I took her instead, and she's lived with

me ever since. Her mother had a friend once, in London here. We are

trying to find her, and to find work too; but it's a large place. Never



mind. More room for us to walk about in, Lilly!'

Meeting the child's eyes with a smile which melted Toby more than tears,

he shook him by the hand.

'I don't so much as know your name,' he said, 'but I've opened my heart

free to you, for I'm thankful to you; with good reason. I'll take your

advice, and keep clear of this—'

'Justice,' suggested Toby.

'Ah!' he said. 'If that's the name they give him. This Justice. And to-

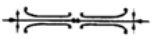
morrow will try whether there's better fortun' to be met with,

somewheres near London. Good night. A Happy New Year!'

'Stay!' cried Trotty, catching at his hand, as he relaxed his

grip. 'Stay! The New Year never can be happy to me, if we part like

this. The New Year never can be happy to me, if I see the child and you[37]



go wandering away, you don't know where, without a shelter for your

heads. Come home with me! I'm a poor man, living in a poor place; but

I can give you lodging for one night and never miss it. Come home with

me! Here! I'll take her!' cried Trotty, lifting up the child. 'A pretty

one! I'd carry twenty times her weight, and never know I'd got it. Tell

me if I go too quick for you. I'm very fast. I always was!' Trotty said

this, taking about six of his trotting paces to one stride of his fatigued

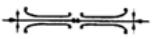
companion; and with his thin legs quivering again, beneath the load he

bore.

'Why, she's as light,' said Trotty, trotting in his speech as well as in his

gait; for he couldn't bear to be thanked, and dreaded a moment's pause;

'as light as a feather. Lighter than a Peacock's feather —a great deal



lighter. Here we are and here we go! Round this first turning to the

right, Uncle Will, and past the pump, and sharp off up the passage to the

left, right opposite the public-house. Here we are and here we go! Cross

over, Uncle Will, and mind the kidney pieman at the corner! Here we

are and here we go! Down the Mews here, Uncle Will, and stop at the

black door, with “T. Veck, Ticket Porter,” wrote upon a board; and here

we are and here we go, and here we are indeed, my precious. Meg,

surprising you!’

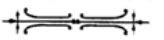
With which words Trotty, in a breathless state, set the child down before

his daughter in the middle of the floor. The little visitor looked once at

Meg; and doubting nothing in that face, but trusting everything she saw

there; ran into her arms.

‘Here we are and here we go!’ cried Trotty, running round the room, and



choking audibly. ‘Here, Uncle Will, here’s a fire you know! Why don’t

you come to the fire? Oh here we are and here we go! Meg, my precious

darling, where’s the kettle? Here it is and here it goes, and it’ll bile in no

time!’

Trotty really had picked up the kettle somewhere or other in the course

of his wild career and now put it on the fire: while Meg, seating the child

in a warm corner, knelt down on the ground before her, and pulled off

her shoes, and dried her wet feet on a cloth. Ay, and she laughed at

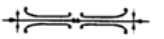
Trotty too—so pleasantly, so cheerfully, that Trotty could have blessed

her where she kneeled; for he had seen that, when they entered, she was

sitting by the fire in tears.[38]

‘Why, father!’ said Meg. ‘You’re crazy to-night, I think. I don’t know

what the Bells would say to that. Poor little feet. How cold they are!’



‘Oh, they’re warmer now!’ exclaimed the child. ‘They’re quite warm

now!’

‘No, no, no,’ said Meg. ‘We haven’t rubbed ’em half enough. We’re so

busy. So busy! And when they’re done, we’ll brush out the damp hair;

and when that’s done, we’ll bring some colour to the poor pale face with

fresh water; and when that’s done, we’ll be so gay, and brisk, and

happy—!’

The child, in a burst of sobbing, clasped her round the neck; caressed her

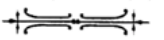
fair cheek with its hand; and said, ‘Oh Meg! oh dear Meg!’

Toby’s blessing could have done no more. Who could do more!

‘Why, father!’ cried Meg, after a pause.

‘Here I am and here I go, my dear!’ said Trotty.

‘Good Gracious me!’ cried Meg. ‘He’s crazy! He’s put the dear child’s



bonnet on the kettle, and hung the lid behind the door!'

'I didn't go for to do it, my love,' said Trotty, hastily repairing this

mistake. 'Meg, my dear?'

Meg looked towards him and saw that he had elaborately stationed

himself behind the chair of their male visitor, where with many

mysterious gestures he was holding up the sixpence he had earned.

'I see, my dear,' said Trotty, 'as I was coming in, half an ounce of tea

lying somewhere on the stairs; and I'm pretty sure there was a bit of

bacon too. As I don't remember where it was exactly, I'll go myself and

try to find 'em.'

With this inscrutable artifice, Toby withdrew to purchase the viands he

had spoken of, for ready money, at Mrs. Chickenstalker's; and presently

came back, pretending he had not been able to find them, at first, in the

dark.

‘But here they are at last,’ said Trotty, setting out the tea-things, ‘all

correct! I was pretty sure it was tea, and a rasher. So it is. Meg, my pet,[39]

if you’ll just make the tea, while your unworthy father toasts the bacon,

we shall be ready, immediate. It’s a curious circumstance,’ said Trotty,

proceeding in his cookery, with the assistance of the toasting-fork,

‘curious, but well known to my friends, that I never care, myself, for

rashers, nor for tea. I like to see other people enjoy ’em,’ said Trotty,

speaking very loud, to impress the fact upon his guest, ‘but to me, as

food, they’re disagreeable.’

Yet Trotty sniffed the savour of the hissing bacon—ah!—as if he liked it;

and when he poured the boiling water in the tea-pot, looked lovingly

down into the depths of that snug cauldron, and suffered the fragrant

steam to curl about his nose, and wreathe his head and face in a thick

cloud. However, for all this, he neither ate nor drank, except at the very

beginning, a mere morsel for form's sake, which he appeared to eat with

infinite relish, but declared was perfectly uninteresting to him.

No. Trotty's occupation was, to see Will Fern and Lilian eat and drink;

and so was Meg's. And never did spectators at a city dinner or court

banquet find such high delight in seeing others feast: although it were a

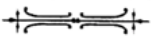
monarch or a pope: as those two did, in looking on that night. Meg

smiled at Trotty, Trotty laughed at Meg. Meg shook her head, and made

belief to clap her hands, applauding Trotty; Trotty conveyed, in dumb-

show, unintelligible narratives of how and when and where he had found

their visitors, to Meg; and they were happy. Very happy.



‘Although,’ thought Trotty, sorrowfully, as he watched Meg’s face; ‘that

match is broken off, I see!’

‘Now, I’ll tell you what,’ said Trotty after tea. ‘The little one, she sleeps

with Meg, I know.’

‘With good Meg!’ cried the child, caressing her. ‘With Meg.’

‘That’s right,’ said Trotty. ‘And I shouldn’t wonder if she kiss Meg’s

father, won’t she? *I’m* Meg’s father.’

Mightily delighted Trotty was, when the child went timidly towards him,

and having kissed him, fell back upon Meg again.[40]

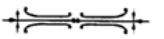
‘She’s as sensible as Solomon,’ said Trotty. ‘Here we come and here we—

no, we don’t—I don’t mean that—I—what was I saying, Meg, my

precious?’

Meg looked towards their guest, who leaned upon her chair, and with his

face turned from her, fondled the child’s head, half hidden in her lap.



‘To be sure,’ said Toby. ‘To be sure! I don’t know what I’m rambling on

about, to-night. My wits are wool-gathering, I think. Will Fern, you

come along with me. You’re tired to death, and broken down for want of

rest. You come along with me.’ The man still played with the child’s

curls, still leaned upon Meg’s chair, still turned away his face. He didn’t

speak, but in his rough coarse fingers, clenching and expanding in the

fair hair of the child, there was an eloquence that said enough.

‘Yes, yes,’ said Trotty, answering unconsciously what he saw expressed in

his daughter’s face. ‘Take her with you, Meg. Get her to

bed. There! Now, Will, I’ll show you where you lie. It’s not much of a

place: only a loft; but, having a loft, I always say, is one of the great

conveniences of living in a mews; and till this coach-house and stable

gets a better let, we live here cheap. There's plenty of sweet hay up there,

belonging to a neighbour; and it's as clean as hands, and Meg, can make

it. Cheer up! Don't give way. A new heart for a New Year, always!'

The hand released from the child's hair, had fallen, trembling, into

Trotty's hand. So Trotty, talking without intermission, led him out as

tenderly and easily as if he had been a child himself. Returning before

Meg, he listened for an instant at the door of her little chamber; an

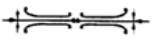
adjoining room. The child was murmuring a simple Prayer before lying

down to sleep; and when she had remembered Meg's name, 'Dearly,

Dearly'—so her words ran—Trotty heard her stop and ask for his.

It was some short time before the foolish little old fellow could compose

himself to mend the fire, and draw his chair to the warm hearth. But,



when he had done so, and had trimmed the light, he took his newspaper

from his pocket, and began to read. Carelessly at first, and skimming up

and down the columns; but with an earnest and a sad attention, very

soon.

For this same dreaded paper re-directed Trotty's thoughts into the

channel they had taken all that day, and which the day's events had so41

marked out and shaped. His interest in the two wanderers had set him

on another course of thinking, and a happier one, for the time; but being

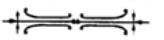
alone again, and reading of the crimes and violences of the people, he

relapsed into his former train.

In this mood, he came to an account (and it was not the first he had ever

read) of a woman who had laid her desperate hands not only on her own

life but on that of her young child. A crime so terrible, and so revolting



to his soul, dilated with the love of Meg, that he let the journal drop, and

fell back in his chair, appalled!

'Unnatural and cruel!' Toby cried. 'Unnatural and cruel! None but

people who were bad at heart, born bad, who had no business on the

earth, could do such deeds. It's too true, all I've heard to-day; too just,

too full of proof. We're Bad!'

The Chimes took up the words so suddenly—burst out so loud, and clear,

and sonorous—that the Bells seemed to strike him in his chair.

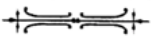
And what was that, they said?

'Toby Veck, Toby Veck, waiting for you Toby! Toby Veck, Toby Veck,

waiting for you Toby! Come and see us, come and see us, Drag him to us,

drag him to us, Haunt and hunt him, haunt and hunt him, Break his

slumbers, break his slumbers! Toby Veck Toby Veck, door open wide



Toby, Toby Veck Toby Veck, door open wide Toby—' then fiercely back to

their impetuous strain again, and ringing in the very bricks and plaster

on the walls.

Toby listened. Fancy, fancy! His remorse for having run away from

them that afternoon! No, no. Nothing of the kind. Again, again, and yet

a dozen times again. 'Haunt and hunt him, haunt and hunt him, Drag

him to us, drag him to us!' Deafening the whole town!

'Meg,' said Trotty softly: tapping at her door. 'Do you hear anything?'

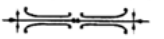
'I hear the Bells, father. Surely they're very loud to-night.'

'Is she asleep?' said Toby, making an excuse for peeping in.

'So peacefully and happily! I can't leave her yet though, father. Look

how she holds my hand!'[42]

'Meg,' whispered Trotty. 'Listen to the Bells!'



She listened, with her face towards him all the time. But it underwent no

change. She didn't understand them.

Trotty withdrew, resumed his seat by the fire, and once more listened by

himself. He remained here a little time.

It was impossible to bear it; their energy was dreadful.

'If the tower-door is really open,' said Toby, hastily laying aside his

apron, but never thinking of his hat, 'what's to hinder me from going up

into the steeple and satisfying myself? If it's shut, I don't want any other

satisfaction. That's enough.'

He was pretty certain as he slipped out quietly into the street that he

should find it shut and locked, for he knew the door well, and had so

rarely seen it open, that he couldn't reckon above three times in all. It

was a low arched portal, outside the church, in a dark nook behind a

column; and had such great iron hinges, and such a monstrous lock, that

there was more hinge and lock than door.

But what was his astonishment when, coming bare-headed to the

church; and putting his hand into this dark nook, with a certain

misgiving that it might be unexpectedly seized, and a shivering

propensity to draw it back again; he found that the door, which opened

outwards, actually stood ajar!

He thought, on the first surprise, of going back; or of getting a light, or a

companion, but his courage aided him immediately, and he determined

to ascend alone.

'What have I to fear?' said Trotty. 'It's a church! Besides, the ringers

may be there, and have forgotten to shut the door.' So he went in, feeling

his way as he went, like a blind man; for it was very dark. And very

quiet, for the Chimes were silent.

The dust from the street had blown into the recess; and lying there,

heaped up, made it so soft and velvet-like to the foot, that there was

something startling, even in that. The narrow stair was so close to the

door, too, that he stumbled at the very first; and shutting the door upon43

himself, by striking it with his foot, and causing it to rebound back

heavily, he couldn't open it again.

This was another reason, however, for going on. Trotty groped his way,

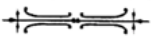
and went on. Up, up, up, and round, and round; and up, up, up; higher,

higher, higher up!

It was a disagreeable staircase for that groping work; so low and narrow,

that his groping hand was always touching something; and it often felt so

like a man or ghostly figure standing up erect and making room for him



to pass without discovery, that he would rub the smooth wall upward

searching for its face, and downward searching for its feet, while a chill

tingling crept all over him. Twice or thrice, a door or niche broke the

monotonous surface; and then it seemed a gap as wide as the whole

church; and he felt on the brink of an abyss, and going to tumble

headlong down, until he found the wall again.

Still up, up, up; and round and round; and up, up, up; higher, higher,

higher up!

At length, the dull and stifling atmosphere began to freshen: presently to

feel quite windy: presently it blew so strong, that he could hardly keep

his legs. But, he got to an arched window in the tower, breast high, and

holding tight, looked down upon the house-tops, on the smoking

chimneys, on the blur and blotch of lights (towards the place where Meg

was wondering where he was and calling to him perhaps), all kneaded up

together in a leaven of mist and darkness.

This was the belfry, where the ringers came. He had caught hold of one

of the frayed ropes which hung down through apertures in the oaken

roof. At first he started, thinking it was hair; then trembled at the very

thought of waking the deep Bell. The Bells themselves were

higher. Higher, Trotty, in his fascination, or in working out the spell

upon him, groped his way. By ladders now, and toilsomely, for it was

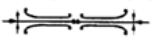
steep, and not too certain holding for the feet.

Up, up, up; and climb and clamber; up, up, up; higher, higher, higher up!

Until, ascending through the floor, and pausing with his head just raised

above its beams, he came among the Bells. It was barely possible to[44]

make out their great shapes in the gloom; but there they were. Shadowy,



and dark, and dumb.

A heavy sense of dread and loneliness fell instantly upon him, as he

climbed into this airy nest of stone and metal. His head went round and

round. He listened, and then raised a wild ‘Holloa!’ Holloa! was

mournfully protracted by the echoes.

Giddy, confused, and out of breath, and frightened, Toby looked about

him vacantly, and sunk down in a swoon.[45]

CHAPTER 3. THIRD QUARTER

Black are the brooding clouds and troubled the deep waters, when the

Sea of Thought, first heaving from a calm, gives up its Dead. Monsters

uncouth and wild, arise in premature, imperfect resurrection; the several

parts and shapes of different things are joined and mixed by chance; and

when, and how, and by what wonderful degrees, each separates from

each, and every sense and object of the mind resumes its usual form and

lives again, no man—though every man is every day the casket of this

type of the Great Mystery—can tell.

So, when and how the darkness of the night-black steeple changed to

shining light; when and how the solitary tower was peopled with a

myriad figures; when and how the whispered 'Haunt and hunt him,'

breathing monotonously through his sleep or swoon, became a voice

exclaiming in the waking ears of Trotty, 'Break his slumbers;' when and

how he ceased to have a sluggish and confused idea that such things

were, companioning a host of others that were not; there are no dates or

means to tell. But, awake and standing on his feet upon the boards

where he had lately lain, he saw this Goblin Sight.

He saw the tower, whither his charmed footsteps had brought him,

swarming with dwarf phantoms, spirits, elfin creatures of the Bells. He

saw them leaping, flying, dropping, pouring from the Bells without a

pause. He saw them, round him on the ground; above him, in the air;

clambering from him, by the ropes below; looking down upon him, from

the massive iron-girded beams; peeping in upon him, through the chinks

and loopholes in the walls; spreading away and away from him in

enlarging circles, as the water ripples give way to a huge stone that

suddenly comes plashing in among them. He saw them, of all aspects

and all shapes. He saw them ugly, handsome, crippled, exquisitely

formed. He saw them young, he saw them old, he saw them kind, he saw

them cruel, he saw them merry, he saw them grim; he saw them dance,

and heard them sing; he saw them tear their hair, and heard them

howl. He saw the air thick with them. He saw them come and go,

incessantly. He saw them riding downward, soaring upward, sailing off

afar, perching near at hand, all restless and all violently active. Stone,[46]

and brick, and slate, and tile, became transparent to him as to them. He

saw them *in* the houses, busy at the sleepers' beds. He saw them

soothing people in their dreams; he saw them beating them with knotted

whips; he saw them yelling in their ears; he saw them playing softest

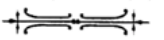
music on their pillows; he saw them cheering some with the songs of

birds and the perfume of flowers; he saw them flashing awful faces on

the troubled rest of others, from enchanted mirrors which they carried in

their hands.

He saw these creatures, not only among sleeping men but waking also,



active in pursuits irreconcilable with one another, and possessing or

assuming natures the most opposite. He saw one buckling on

innumerable wings to increase his speed; another loading himself with

chains and weights, to retard his. He saw some putting the hands of

clocks forward, some putting the hands of clocks backward, some

endeavouring to stop the clock entirely. He saw them representing, here

a marriage ceremony, there a funeral; in this chamber an election, in that

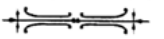
a ball he saw, everywhere, restless and untiring motion.

Bewildered by the host of shifting and extraordinary figures, as well as by

the uproar of the Bells, which all this while were ringing, Trotty clung to

a wooden pillar for support, and turned his white face here and there, in

mute and stunned astonishment.



As he gazed, the Chimes stopped. Instantaneous change! The whole

swarm fainted! their forms collapsed, their speed deserted them; they

sought to fly, but in the act of falling died and melted into air. No fresh

supply succeeded them. One straggler leaped down pretty briskly from

the surface of the Great Bell, and alighted on his feet, but he was dead

and gone before he could turn round. Some few of the late company who

had gambolled in the tower, remained there, spinning over and over a

little longer; but these became at every turn more faint, and few, and

feeble, and soon went the way of the rest. The last of all was one small

hunchback, who had got into an echoing corner, where he twirled and

twirled, and floated by himself a long time; showing such perseverance,

that at last he dwindled to a leg and even to a foot, before he finally

retired; but he vanished in the end, and then the tower was silent.

Then and not before, did Trotty see in every Bell a bearded figure of the

bulk and stature of the Bell—incomprehensibly, a figure and the Bell[47]

itself. Gigantic, grave, and darkly watchful of him, as he stood rooted to

the ground.

Mysterious and awful figures! Resting on nothing; poised in the night

air of the tower, with their draped and hooded heads merged in the dim

roof; motionless and shadowy. Shadowy and dark, although he saw

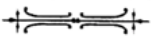
them by some light belonging to themselves—none else was there—each

with its muffled hand upon its goblin mouth.

He could not plunge down wildly through the opening in the floor; for all

power of motion had deserted him. Otherwise he would have done so—

aye, would have thrown himself, headforemost, from the steeple-top,



rather than have seen them watching him with eyes that would have

waked and watched although the pupils had been taken out.

Again, again, the dread and terror of the lonely place, and of the wild and

fearful night that reigned there, touched him like a spectral hand. His

distance from all help; the long, dark, winding, ghost-beleaguered way

that lay between him and the earth on which men lived; his being high,

high, high, up there, where it had made him dizzy to see the birds fly in

the day; cut off from all good people, who at such an hour were safe at

home and sleeping in their beds; all this struck coldly through him, not

as a reflection but a bodily sensation. Meantime his eyes and thoughts

and fears, were fixed upon the watchful figures; which, rendered unlike

any figures of this world by the deep gloom and shade enwrapping and

enfolding them, as well as by their looks and forms and supernatural

hovering above the floor, were nevertheless as plainly to be seen as were

the stalwart oaken frames, cross-pieces, bars and beams, set up there to

support the Bells. These hemmed them, in a very forest of hewn timber;

from the entanglements, intricacies, and depths of which, as from among

the boughs of a dead wood blighted for their phantom use, they kept

their darksome and unwinking watch.

A blast of air—how cold and shrill!—came moaning through the

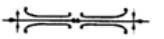
tower. As it died away, the Great Bell, or the Goblin of the Great Bell,

spoke.

'What visitor is this!' it said. The voice was low and deep, and Trotty

fancied that it sounded in the other figures as well.[48]

'I thought my name was called by the Chimes!' said Trotty, raising his



hands in an attitude of supplication. ‘I hardly know why I am here, or

how I came. I have listened to the Chimes these many years. They have

cheered me often.’

‘And you have thanked them?’ said the Bell.

‘A thousand times!’ cried Trotty.

‘How?’

‘I am a poor man,’ faltered Trotty, ‘and could only thank them in words.’

‘And always so?’ inquired the Goblin of the Bell. ‘Have you never done

us wrong in words?’

‘No!’ cried Trotty eagerly.

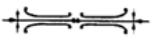
‘Never done us foul, and false, and wicked wrong, in words?’ pursued the

Goblin of the Bell.

Trotty was about to answer, ‘Never!’ But he stopped, and was confused.

‘The voice of Time,’ said the Phantom, ‘cries to man, Advance! Time is

for his advancement and improvement; for his greater worth, his greater



happiness, his better life; his progress onward to that goal within its

knowledge and its view, and set there, in the period when Time and He

began. Ages of darkness, wickedness, and violence, have come and

gone—millions uncountable, have suffered, lived, and died—to point the

way before him. Who seeks to turn him back, or stay him on his course,

arrests a mighty engine which will strike the meddler dead; and be the

fiercer and the wilder, ever, for its momentary check!'

'I never did so to my knowledge, sir,' said Trotty. 'It was quite by

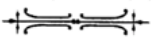
accident if I did. I wouldn't go to do it, I'm sure.'

'Who puts into the mouth of Time, or of its servants,' said the Goblin of

the Bell, 'a cry of lamentation for days which have had their trial and

their failure, and have left deep traces of it which the blind may see—a

cry that only serves the present time, by showing men how much it needs



their help when any ears can listen to regrets for such a past—who does

this, does a wrong. And you have done that wrong, to us, the Chimes.'[49]

Trotty's first excess of fear was gone. But he had felt tenderly and

gratefully towards the Bells, as you have seen; and when he heard

himself arraigned as one who had offended them so weightily, his heart

was touched with penitence and grief.

'If you knew,' said Trotty, clasping his hands earnestly—'or perhaps you

do know—if you know how often you have kept me company; how often

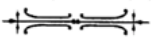
you have cheered me up when I've been low; how you were quite the

plaything of my little daughter Meg (almost the only one she ever had)

when first her mother died, and she and me were left alone; you won't

bear malice for a hasty word!'

'Who hears in us, the Chimes, one note bespeaking disregard, or stern



regard, of any hope, or joy, or pain, or sorrow, of the many-sorrowed

throng; who hears us make response to any creed that gauges human

passions and affections, as it gauges the amount of miserable food on

which humanity may pine and wither; does us wrong. That wrong you

have done us!' said the Bell.

'I have!' said Trotty. 'Oh forgive me!'

'Who hears us echo the dull vermin of the earth: the Putters Down of

crushed and broken natures, formed to be raised up higher than such

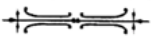
maggots of the time can crawl or can conceive,' pursued the Goblin of the

Bell; 'who does so, does us wrong. And you have done us wrong!'

'Not meaning it,' said Trotty. 'In my ignorance. Not meaning it!'

'Lastly, and most of all,' pursued the Bell. 'Who turns his back upon the

fallen and disfigured of his kind; abandons them as vile; and does not



trace and track with pitying eyes the unfenced precipice by which they

fell from good—grasping in their fall some tufts and shreds of that lost

soil, and clinging to them still when bruised and dying in the gulf below;

does wrong to Heaven and man, to time and to eternity. And you have

done that wrong!'

'Spare me!' cried Trotty, falling on his knees; 'for Mercy's sake!'

'Listen!' said the Shadow.

'Listen!' cried the other Shadows.[50]

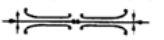
'Listen!' said a clear and childlike voice, which Trotty thought he

recognised as having heard before.

The organ sounded faintly in the church below. Swelling by degrees, the

melody ascended to the roof, and filled the choir and nave. Expanding

more and more, it rose up, up; up, up; higher, higher, higher up;



awakening agitated hearts within the burly piles of oak: the hollow bells,

the iron-bound doors, the stairs of solid stone; until the tower walls were

insufficient to contain it, and it soared into the sky.

No wonder that an old man's breast could not contain a sound so vast

and mighty. It broke from that weak prison in a rush of tears; and Trotty

put his hands before his face.

'Listen!' said the Shadow.

'Listen!' said the other Shadows.

'Listen!' said the child's voice.

A solemn strain of blended voices, rose into the tower.

It was a very low and mournful strain—a Dirge—and as he listened,

Trotty heard his child among the singers.

'She is dead!' exclaimed the old man. 'Meg is dead! Her Spirit calls to

me. I hear it!'

'The Spirit of your child bewails the dead, and mingles with the dead—

dead hopes, dead fancies, dead imaginings of youth,' returned the Bell,

'but she is living. Learn from her life, a living truth. Learn from the

creature dearest to your heart, how bad the bad are born. See every bud

and leaf plucked one by one from off the fairest stem, and know how

bare and wretched it may be. Follow her! To desperation!'

Each of the shadowy figures stretched its right arm forth, and pointed

downward.

'The Spirit of the Chimes is your companion,' said the figure.

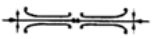
'Go! It stands behind you!'

Trotty turned, and saw—the child! The child Will Fern had carried in the

street; the child whom Meg had watched, but now, asleep![51]

'I carried her myself, to-night,' said Trotty. 'In these arms!'

'Show him what he calls himself,' said the dark figures, one and all.



The tower opened at his feet. He looked down, and beheld his own form,

lying at the bottom, on the outside: crushed and motionless.

‘No more a living man!’ cried Trotty. ‘Dead!’

‘Dead!’ said the figures all together.

‘Gracious Heaven! And the New Year—’

‘Past,’ said the figures.

‘What!’ he cried, shuddering. ‘I missed my way, and coming on the

outside of this tower in the dark, fell down—a year ago?’

‘Nine years ago!’ replied the figures.

As they gave the answer, they recalled their outstretched hands; and

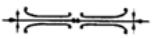
where their figures had been, there the Bells were.

And they rung; their time being come again. And once again, vast

multitudes of phantoms sprung into existence; once again, were

incoherently engaged, as they had been before; once again, faded on the

stopping of the Chimes; and dwindled into nothing.



‘What are these?’ he asked his guide. ‘If I am not mad, what are these?’

‘Spirits of the Bells. Their sound upon the air,’ returned the child. ‘They

take such shapes and occupations as the hopes and thoughts of mortals,

and the recollections they have stored up, give them.’

‘And you,’ said Trotty wildly. ‘What are you?’

‘Hush, hush!’ returned the child. ‘Look here!’

In a poor, mean room; working at the same kind of embroidery which he

had often, often seen before her; Meg, his own dear daughter, was

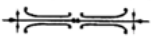
presented to his view. He made no effort to imprint his kisses on her

face; he did not strive to clasp her to his loving heart; he knew that such

endearments were, for him, no more. But, he held his trembling breath,

and brushed away the blinding tears, that he might look upon her; that

he might only see her.[52]



Ah! Changed. Changed. The light of the clear eye, how dimmed. The

bloom, how faded from the cheek. Beautiful she was, as she had ever

been, but Hope, Hope, Hope, oh where was the fresh Hope that had

spoken to him like a voice!

She looked up from her work, at a companion. Following her eyes, the

old man started back.

In the woman grown, he recognised her at a glance. In the long silken

hair, he saw the self-same curls; around the lips, the child's expression

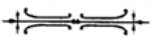
lingering still. See! In the eyes, now turned inquiringly on Meg, there

shone the very look that scanned those features when he brought her

home!

Then what was this, beside him!

Looking with awe into its face, he saw a something reigning there: a lofty



something, undefined and indistinct, which made it hardly more than a

remembrance of that child—as yonder figure might be—yet it was the

same: the same: and wore the dress.

Hark. They were speaking!

‘Meg,’ said Lilian, hesitating. ‘How often you raise your head from your

work to look at me!’

‘Are my looks so altered, that they frighten you?’ asked Meg.

‘Nay, dear! But you smile at that, yourself! Why not smile, when you

look at me, Meg?’

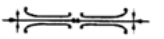
‘I do so. Do I not?’ she answered: smiling on her.

‘Now you do,’ said Lilian, ‘but not usually. When you think I’m busy, and

don’t see you, you look so anxious and so doubtful, that I hardly like to

raise my eyes. There is little cause for smiling in this hard and toilsome

life, but you were once so cheerful.’



‘Am I not now!’ cried Meg, speaking in a tone of strange alarm, and

rising to embrace her. ‘Do I make our weary life more weary to you,

Lilian!’[53]

‘You have been the only thing that made it life,’ said Lilian, fervently

kissing her; ‘sometimes the only thing that made me care to live so,

Meg. Such work, such work! So many hours, so many days, so many

long, long nights of hopeless, cheerless, never-ending work—not to heap

up riches, not to live grandly or gaily, not to live upon enough, however

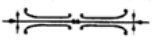
coarse; but to earn bare bread; to scrape together just enough to toil

upon, and want upon, and keep alive in us the consciousness of our hard

fate! Oh Meg, Meg!’ she raised her voice and twined her arms about her

as she spoke, like one in pain. ‘How can the cruel world go round, and

bear to look upon such lives!’



‘Lilly!’ said Meg, soothing her, and putting back her hair from her wet

face. ‘Why, Lilly! You! So pretty and so young!’

‘Oh Meg!’ she interrupted, holding her at arm’s-length, and looking in

her face imploringly. ‘The worst of all, the worst of all! Strike me old,

Meg! Wither me, and shrivel me, and free me from the dreadful

thoughts that tempt me in my youth!’

Trotty turned to look upon his guide. But the Spirit of the child had

taken flight. Was gone.

Neither did he himself remain in the same place; for, Sir Joseph Bowley,

Friend and Father of the Poor, held a great festivity at Bowley Hall, in

honour of the natal day of Lady Bowley. And as Lady Bowley had been

born on New Year’s Day (which the local newspapers considered an

especial pointing of the finger of Providence to number One, as Lady

Bowley's destined figure in Creation), it was on a New Year's Day that

this festivity took place.

Bowley Hall was full of visitors. The red-faced gentleman was there, Mr.

Filer was there, the great Alderman Cute was there—Alderman Cute had

a sympathetic feeling with great people, and had considerably improved

his acquaintance with Sir Joseph Bowley on the strength of his attentive

letter: indeed had become quite a friend of the family since then—and

many guests were there. Trotty's ghost was there, wandering about, poor

phantom, drearily; and looking for its guide.

There was to be a great dinner in the Great Hall. At which Sir Joseph

Bowley, in his celebrated character of Friend and Father of the Poor, was

to make his great speech. Certain plum-puddings were to be eaten by his[54]

Friends and Children in another Hall first; and, at a given signal, Friends

and Children flocking in among their Friends and Fathers, were to form

a family assemblage, with not one manly eye therein unmoistened by

emotion.

But, there was more than this to happen. Even more than this. Sir

Joseph Bowley, Baronet and Member of Parliament, was to play a match

at skittles—real skittles—with his tenants!

'Which quite reminds me,' said Alderman Cute, 'of the days of old King

Hal, stout King Hal, bluff King Hal. Ah! Fine character!'

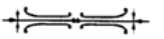
'Very,' said Mr. Filer, dryly. 'For marrying women and murdering

'em. Considerably more than the average number of wives by the bye.'

'You'll marry the beautiful ladies, and not murder 'em, eh?' said

Alderman Cute to the heir of Bowley, aged twelve. 'Sweet boy! We shall

have this little gentleman in Parliament now,' said the Alderman,



holding him by the shoulders, and looking as reflective as he could,

‘before we know where we are. We shall hear of his successes at the poll;

his speeches in the House; his overtures from Governments; his brilliant

achievements of all kinds; ah! we shall make our little orations about him

in the Common Council, I’ll be bound; before we have time to look about

us!’

‘Oh, the difference of shoes and stockings!’ Trotty thought. But his heart

yearned towards the child, for the love of those same shoeless and

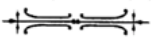
stockingless boys, predestined (by the Alderman) to turn out bad, who

might have been the children of poor Meg.

‘Richard,’ moaned Trotty, roaming among the company, to and fro;

‘where is he? I can’t find Richard! Where is Richard?’ Not likely to be

there, if still alive! But Trotty’s grief and solitude confused him; and he



still went wandering among the gallant company, looking for his guide,

and saying, ‘Where is Richard? Show me Richard!’

He was wandering thus, when he encountered Mr. Fish, the confidential

Secretary: in great agitation.

‘Bless my heart and soul!’ cried Mr. Fish. ‘Where’s Alderman Cute? Has

anybody seen the Alderman?’[55]

Seen the Alderman? Oh dear! Who could ever help seeing the

Alderman? He was so considerate, so affable, he bore so much in mind

the natural desires of folks to see him, that if he had a fault, it was the

being constantly On View. And wherever the great people were, there, to

be sure, attracted by the kindred sympathy between great souls, was

Cute.

Several voices cried that he was in the circle round Sir Joseph. Mr. Fish

made way there; found him; and took him secretly into a window near at

hand. Trotty joined them. Not of his own accord. He felt that his steps

were led in that direction.

'My dear Alderman Cute,' said Mr. Fish. 'A little more this way. The

most dreadful circumstance has occurred. I have this moment received

the intelligence. I think it will be best not to acquaint Sir Joseph with it

till the day is over. You understand Sir Joseph, and will give me your

opinion. The most frightful and deplorable event!'

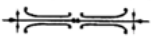
'Fish!' returned the Alderman. 'Fish! My good fellow, what is the

matter? Nothing revolutionary, I hope! No—no attempted interference

with the magistrates?'

'Deedles, the banker,' gasped the Secretary. 'Deedles Brothers—who was

to have been here to-day—high in office in the Goldsmiths' Company—'



‘Not stopped!’ exclaimed the Alderman, ‘It can’t be!’

‘Shot himself.’

‘Good God!’

‘Put a double-barrelled pistol to his mouth, in his own counting house,’

said Mr. Fish, ‘and blew his brains out. No motive. Princely

circumstances!’

‘Circumstances!’ exclaimed the Alderman. ‘A man of noble fortune. One

of the most respectable of men. Suicide, Mr. Fish! By his own hand!’

‘This very morning,’ returned Mr. Fish.

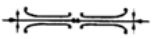
‘Oh the brain, the brain!’ exclaimed the pious Alderman, lifting up his

hands. ‘Oh the nerves, the nerves; the mysteries of this machine called

Man! Oh the little that unhinges it: poor creatures that we are! Perhaps[56]

a dinner, Mr. Fish. Perhaps the conduct of his son, who, I have heard,

ran very wild, and was in the habit of drawing bills upon him without the



least authority! A most respectable man. One of the most respectable

men I ever knew! A lamentable instance, Mr. Fish. A public calamity! I

shall make a point of wearing the deepest mourning. A most respectable

man! But there is One above. We must submit, Mr. Fish. We must

submit!'

What, Alderman! No word of Putting Down? Remember, Justice, your

high moral boast and pride. Come, Alderman! Balance those

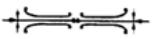
scales. Throw me into this, the empty one, no dinner, and Nature's

founts in some poor woman, dried by starving misery and rendered

obdurate to claims for which her offspring *has* authority in holy mother

Eve. Weigh me the two, you Daniel, going to judgment, when your day

shall come! Weigh them, in the eyes of suffering thousands, audience



(not unmindful) of the grim farce you play. Or supposing that you

strayed from your five wits—it's not so far to go, but that it might be—

and laid hands upon that throat of yours, warning your fellows (if you

have a fellow) how they croak their comfortable wickedness to raving

heads and stricken hearts. What then?

The words rose up in Trotty's breast, as if they had been spoken by some

other voice within him. Alderman Cute pledged himself to Mr. Fish that

he would assist him in breaking the melancholy catastrophe to Sir

Joseph when the day was over. Then, before they parted, wringing Mr.

Fish's hand in bitterness of soul, he said, 'The most respectable of

men!' And added that he hardly knew (not even he), why such afflictions

were allowed on earth.

'It's almost enough to make one think, if one didn't know better,' said

Alderman Cute, ‘that at times some motion of a capsizing nature was

going on in things, which affected the general economy of the social

fabric. Deedles Brothers!’

The skittle-playing came off with immense success. Sir Joseph knocked

the pins about quite skilfully; Master Bowley took an innings at a shorter

distance also; and everybody said that now, when a Baronet and the Son

of a Baronet played at skittles, the country was coming round again, as

fast as it could come.[57]

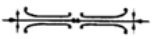
At its proper time, the Banquet was served up. Trotty involuntarily

repaired to the Hall with the rest, for he felt himself conducted thither by

some stronger impulse than his own free will. The sight was gay in the

extreme; the ladies were very handsome; the visitors delighted, cheerful,

and good-tempered. When the lower doors were opened, and the people



flocked in, in their rustic dresses, the beauty of the spectacle was at its

height; but Trotty only murmured more and more, ‘Where is

Richard! He should help and comfort her! I can’t see Richard!’

There had been some speeches made; and Lady Bowley’s health had

been proposed; and Sir Joseph Bowley had returned thanks, and had

made his great speech, showing by various pieces of evidence that he was

the born Friend and Father, and so forth; and had given as a Toast, his

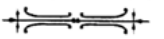
Friends and Children, and the Dignity of Labour; when a slight

disturbance at the bottom of the Hall attracted Toby’s notice. After some

confusion, noise, and opposition, one man broke through the rest, and

stood forward by himself.

Not Richard. No. But one whom he had thought of, and had looked for,



many times. In a scantier supply of light, he might have doubted the

identity of that worn man, so old, and grey, and bent; but with a blaze of

lamps upon his gnarled and knotted head, he knew Will Fern as soon as

he stepped forth.

'What is this!' exclaimed Sir Joseph, rising. 'Who gave this man

admittance? This is a criminal from prison! Mr. Fish, sir, *will* you have

the goodness—'

'A minute!' said Will Fern. 'A minute! My Lady, you was born on this

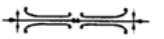
day along with a New Year. Get me a minute's leave to speak.'

She made some intercession for him. Sir Joseph took his seat again, with

native dignity.

The ragged visitor—for he was miserably dressed—looked round upon

the company, and made his homage to them with a humble bow.



‘Gentlefolks!’ he said. ‘You’ve drunk the Labourer. Look at me!’

‘Just come from jail,’ said Mr. Fish.[58]

‘Just come from jail,’ said Will. ‘And neither for the first time, nor the

second, nor the third, nor yet the fourth.’

Mr. Filer was heard to remark testily, that four times was over the

average; and he ought to be ashamed of himself.

‘Gentlefolks!’ repeated Will Fern. ‘Look at me! You see I’m at the

worst. Beyond all hurt or harm; beyond your help; for the time when

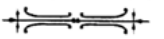
your kind words or kind actions could have done me good,’—he struck

his hand upon his breast, and shook his head, ‘is gone, with the scent of

last year’s beans or clover on the air. Let me say a word for these,’

pointing to the labouring people in the Hall; ‘and when you’re met

together, hear the real Truth spoke out for once.’



‘There’s not a man here,’ said the host, ‘who would have him for a

spokesman.’

‘Like enough, Sir Joseph. I believe it. Not the less true, perhaps, is what

I say. Perhaps that’s a proof on it. Gentlefolks, I’ve lived many a year in

this place. You may see the cottage from the sunk fence over

yonder. I’ve seen the ladies draw it in their books, a hundred times. It

looks well in a picter, I’ve heerd say; but there an’t weather in picters,

and maybe ’tis fitter for that, than for a place to live in. Well! I lived

there. How hard—how bitter hard, I lived there, I won’t say. Any day in

the year, and every day, you can judge for your own selves.’

He spoke as he had spoken on the night when Trotty found him in the

street. His voice was deeper and more husky, and had a trembling in it

now and then; but he never raised it passionately, and seldom lifted it

above the firm stern level of the homely facts he stated.

‘’Tis harder than you think for, gentlefolks, to grow up decent, commonly

decent, in such a place. That I growed up a man and not a brute, says

something for me—as I was then. As I am now, there’s nothing can be

said for me or done for me. I’m past it.’

‘I am glad this man has entered,’ observed Sir Joseph, looking round

serenely. ‘Don’t disturb him. It appears to be Ordained. He is an

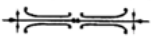
example: a living example. I hope and trust, and confidently expect, that

it will not be lost upon my Friends here.’[59]

‘I dragged on,’ said Fern, after a moment’s silence, ‘somehow. Neither

me nor any other man knows how; but so heavy, that I couldn’t put a

cheerful face upon it, or make believe that I was anything but what I



was. Now, gentlemen—you gentlemen that sits at Sessions—when you

see a man with discontent writ on his face, you says to one another, “He’s

suspicious. I has my doubts,” says you, “about Will Fern. Watch that

fellow!” I don’t say, gentlemen, it ain’t quite nat’ral, but I say ’tis so; and

from that hour, whatever Will Fern does, or lets alone—all one—it goes

against him.’

Alderman Cute stuck his thumbs in his waistcoat-pockets, and leaning

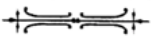
back in his chair, and smiling, winked at a neighbouring chandelier. As

much as to say, ‘Of course! I told you so. The common cry! Lord bless

you, we are up to all this sort of thing—myself and human nature.’

‘Now, gentlemen,’ said Will Fern, holding out his hands, and flushing for

an instant in his haggard face, ‘see how your laws are made to trap and



hunt us when we're brought to this. I tries to live elsewhere. And I'm a

vagabond. To jail with him! I comes back here. I goes a-nutting in your

woods, and breaks—who don't?—a limber branch or two. To jail with

him! One of your keepers sees me in the broad day, near my own patch

of garden, with a gun. To jail with him! I has a nat'ral angry word with

that man, when I'm free again. To jail with him! I cuts a stick. To jail

with him! I eats a rotten apple or a turnip. To jail with him! It's twenty

mile away; and coming back I begs a trifle on the road. To jail with

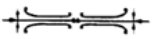
him! At last, the constable, the keeper—anybody—finds me anywhere, a-

doing anything. To jail with him, for he's a vagrant, and a jail-bird

known; and jail's the only home he's got.'

The Alderman nodded sagaciously, as who should say, 'A very good

home too!'



‘Do I say this to serve my cause!’ cried Fern. ‘Who can give me back my

liberty, who can give me back my good name, who can give me back my

innocent niece? Not all the Lords and Ladies in wide England. But,

gentlemen, gentlemen, dealing with other men like me, begin at the right

end. Give us, in mercy, better homes when we’re a-lying in our cradles;

give us better food when we’re a-working for our lives; give us kinder

laws to bring us back when were a-going wrong; and don’t set jail, jail,

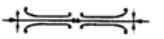
jail, afore us, everywhere we turn. There an’t a condescension you can

show the Labourer then, that he won’t take, as ready and as grateful as a

man can be; for, he has a patient, peaceful, willing heart. But you must

put his rightful spirit in him first; for, whether he’s a wreck and ruin such

as me, or is like one of them that stand here now, his spirit is divided



from you at this time. Bring it back, gentlefolks, bring it back! Bring it

back, afore the day comes when even his Bible changes in his altered

mind, and the words seem to him to read, as they have sometimes read

in my own eyes—in jail: “Whither thou goest, I can Not go; where thou

lodgest, I do Not lodge; thy people are Not my people; Nor thy God my

God!”’

A sudden stir and agitation took place in Hall. Trotty thought at first,

that several had risen to eject the man; and hence this change in its

appearance. But, another moment showed him that the room and all the

company had vanished from his sight, and that his daughter was again

before him, seated at her work. But in a poorer, meaner garret than

before; and with no Lilian by her side.

The frame at which she had worked, was put away upon a shelf and

covered up. The chair in which she had sat, was turned against the

wall. A history was written in these little things, and in Meg's grief-worn

face. Oh! who could fail to read it!

Meg strained her eyes upon her work until it was too dark to see the

threads; and when the night closed in, she lighted her feeble candle and

worked on. Still her old father was invisible about her; looking down

upon her; loving her—how dearly loving her!—and talking to her in a

tender voice about the old times, and the Bells. Though he knew, poor

Trotty, though he knew she could not hear him.

A great part of the evening had worn away, when a knock came at her

door. She opened it. A man was on the threshold. A slouching, moody,

drunken sloven, wasted by intemperance and vice, and with his matted

hair and unshorn beard in wild disorder; but, with some traces on him,

too, of having been a man of good proportion and good features in his

youth.

He stopped until he had her leave to enter; and she, retiring a pace of

two from the open door, silently and sorrowfully looked upon

him. Trotty had his wish. He saw Richard.[61]

'May I come in, Margaret?'

'Yes! Come in. Come in!'

It was well that Trotty knew him before he spoke; for with any doubt

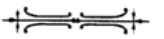
remaining on his mind, the harsh discordant voice would have

persuaded him that it was not Richard but some other man.

There were but two chairs in the room. She gave him hers, and stood at

some short distance from him, waiting to hear what he had to say.

He sat, however, staring vacantly at the floor; with a lustreless and



stupid smile. A spectacle of such deep degradation, of such abject

hopelessness, of such a miserable downfall, that she put her hands

before her face and turned away, lest he should see how much it moved

her.

Roused by the rustling of her dress, or some such trifling sound, he lifted

his head, and began to speak as if there had been no pause since he

entered.

‘Still at work, Margaret? You work late.’

‘I generally do.’

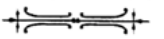
‘And early?’

‘And early.’

‘So she said. She said you never tired; or never owned that you

tired. Not all the time you lived together. Not even when you fainted,

between work and fasting. But I told you that, the last time I came.’



‘You did,’ she answered. ‘And I implored you to tell me nothing more;

and you made me a solemn promise, Richard, that you never would.’

‘A solemn promise,’ he repeated, with a drivelling laugh and vacant

stare. ‘A solemn promise. To be sure. A solemn promise!’ Awakening,

as it were, after a time; in the same manner as before; he said with

sudden animation:

‘How can I help it, Margaret? What am I to do? She has been to me

again!’[62]

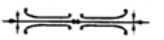
‘Again!’ cried Meg, clasping her hands. ‘O, does she think of me so

often! Has she been again!’

‘Twenty times again,’ said Richard. ‘Margaret, she haunts me. She

comes behind me in the street, and thrusts it in my hand. I hear her foot

upon the ashes when I’m at my work (ha, ha! that an’t often), and before



I can turn my head, her voice is in my ear, saying, “Richard, don’t look

round. For Heaven’s love, give her this!” She brings it where I live: she

sends it in letters; she taps at the window and lays it on the

sill. What *can* I do? Look at it!’

He held out in his hand a little purse, and chinked the money it enclosed.

‘Hide it,’ sad Meg. ‘Hide it! When she comes again, tell her, Richard,

that I love her in my soul. That I never lie down to sleep, but I bless her,

and pray for her. That, in my solitary work, I never cease to have her in

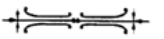
my thoughts. That she is with me, night and day. That if I died to-

morrow, I would remember her with my last breath. But, that I cannot

look upon it!’

He slowly recalled his hand, and crushing the purse together, said with a

kind of drowsy thoughtfulness:



‘I told her so. I told her so, as plain as words could speak. I’ve taken this

gift back and left it at her door, a dozen times since then. But when she

came at last, and stood before me, face to face, what could I do?’

‘You saw her!’ exclaimed Meg. ‘You saw her! O, Lilian, my sweet girl! O,

Lilian, Lilian!’

‘I saw her,’ he went on to say, not answering, but engaged in the same

slow pursuit of his own thoughts. ‘There she stood: trembling! “How

does she look, Richard? Does she ever speak of me? Is she thinner? My

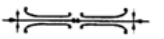
old place at the table: what’s in my old place? And the frame she taught

me our old work on—has she burnt it, Richard!” There she was. I heard

her say it.’

Meg checked her sobs, and with the tears streaming from her eyes, bent

over him to listen. Not to lose a breath.[63]



With his arms resting on his knees; and stooping forward in his chair, as

if what he said were written on the ground in some half legible character,

which it was his occupation to decipher and connect; he went on.

“‘Richard, I have fallen very low; and you may guess how much I have

suffered in having this sent back, when I can bear to bring it in my hand

to you. But you loved her once, even in my memory, dearly. Others

stepped in between you; fears, and jealousies, and doubts, and vanities,

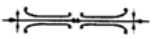
estranged you from her; but you did love her, even in my memory!” I

suppose I did,’ he said, interrupting himself for a moment. ‘I did! That’s

neither here nor there—“O Richard, if you ever did; if you have any

memory for what is gone and lost, take it to her once more. Once

more! Tell her how I laid my head upon your shoulder, where her own



head might have lain, and was so humble to you, Richard. Tell her that

you looked into my face, and saw the beauty which she used to praise, all

gone: all gone: and in its place, a poor, wan, hollow cheek, that she would

weep to see. Tell her everything, and take it back, and she will not refuse

again. She will not have the heart!"'

So he sat musing, and repeating the last words, until he woke again, and

rose.

'You won't take it, Margaret?'

She shook her head, and motioned an entreaty to him to leave her.

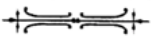
'Good night, Margaret.'

'Good night!'

He turned to look upon her; struck by her sorrow, and perhaps by the

pity for himself which trembled in her voice. It was a quick and rapid

action; and for the moment some flash of his old bearing kindled in his



form. In the next he went as he had come. Nor did this glimmer of a

quenched fire seem to light him to a quicker sense of his debasement.

In any mood, in any grief, in any torture of the mind or body, Meg's work

must be done. She sat down to her task, and plied it. Night,

midnight. Still she worked.

She had a meagre fire, the night being very cold; and rose at intervals to

mend it. The Chimes rang half-past twelve while she was thus engaged;[64]

and when they ceased she heard a gentle knocking at the door. Before

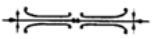
she could so much as wonder who was there, at that unusual hour, it

opened.

O Youth and Beauty, happy as ye should be, look at this. O Youth and

Beauty, blest and blessing all within your reach, and working out the

ends of your Beneficent Creator, look at this!



She saw the entering figure; screamed its name; cried ‘Lilian!’

It was swift, and fell upon its knees before her: clinging to her dress.

‘Up, dear! Up! Lilian! My own dearest!’

‘Never more, Meg; never more! Here! Here! Close to you, holding to

you, feeling your dear breath upon my face!’

‘Sweet Lilian! Darling Lilian! Child of my heart—no mother’s love can

be more tender—lay your head upon my breast!’

‘Never more, Meg. Never more! When I first looked into your face, you

knelt before me. On my knees before you, let me die. Let it be here!’

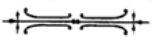
‘You have come back. My Treasure! We will live together, work

together, hope together, die together!’

‘Ah! Kiss my lips, Meg; fold your arms about me; press me to your

bosom; look kindly on me; but don’t raise me. Let it be here. Let me see

the last of your dear face upon my knees!’



O Youth and Beauty, happy as ye should be, look at this! O Youth and

Beauty, working out the ends of your Beneficent Creator, look at this!

‘Forgive me, Meg! So dear, so dear! Forgive me! I know you do, I see

you do, but say so, Meg!’

She said so, with her lips on Lilian’s cheek. And with her arms twined

round—she knew it now—a broken heart.

‘His blessing on you, dearest love. Kiss me once more! He suffered her

to sit beside His feet, and dry them with her hair. O Meg, what Mercy

and Compassion!’[65]

As she died, the Spirit of the child returning, innocent and radiant,

touched the old man with its hand, and beckoned him away.[66]

CHAPTER 4. FOURTH QUARTER

Some new remembrance of the ghostly figures in the Bells; some faint

impression of the ringing of the Chimes; some giddy consciousness of

having seen the swarm of phantoms reproduced and reproduced until

the recollection of them lost itself in the confusion of their numbers;

some hurried knowledge, how conveyed to him he knew not, that more

years had passed; and Trotty, with the Spirit of the child attending him,

stood looking on at mortal company.

Fat company, rosy-cheeked company, comfortable company. They were

but two, but they were red enough for ten. They sat before a bright fire,

with a small low table between them; and unless the fragrance of hot tea

and muffins lingered longer in that room than in most others, the table

had seen service very lately. But all the cups and saucers being clean,

and in their proper places in the corner-cupboard; and the brass

toasting-fork hanging in its usual nook and spreading its four idle fingers

out as if it wanted to be measured for a glove; there remained no other

visible tokens of the meal just finished, than such as purred and washed

their whiskers in the person of the basking cat, and glistened in the

gracious, not to say the greasy, faces of her patrons.

This cosy couple (married, evidently) had made a fair division of the fire

between them, and sat looking at the glowing sparks that dropped into

the grate; now nodding off into a doze; now waking up again when some

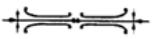
hot fragment, larger than the rest, came rattling down, as if the fire were

coming with it.

It was in no danger of sudden extinction, however; for it gleamed not

only in the little room, and on the panes of window-glass in the door, and

on the curtain half drawn across them, but in the little shop beyond. A



little shop, quite crammed and choked with the abundance of its stock; a

perfectly voracious little shop, with a maw as accommodating and full as

any shark's. Cheese, butter, firewood, soap, pickles, matches, bacon,

table-beer, peg-tops, sweetmeats, boys' kites, bird-seed, cold ham, birch

brooms, hearth-stones, salt, vinegar, blacking, red-herrings, stationery,

lard, mushroom-ketchup, staylaces, loaves of bread, shuttlecocks, eggs,[67]

and slate pencil; everything was fish that came to the net of this greedy

little shop, and all articles were in its net. How many other kinds of petty

merchandise were there, it would be difficult to say; but balls of

packthread, ropes of onions, pounds of candles, cabbage-nets, and

brushes, hung in bunches from the ceiling, like extraordinary fruit; while

various odd canisters emitting aromatic smells, established the veracity

of the inscription over the outer door, which informed the public that the

keeper of this little shop was a licensed dealer in tea, coffee, tobacco,

pepper, and snuff.

Glancing at such of these articles as were visible in the shining of the

blaze, and the less cheerful radiance of two smoky lamps which burnt but

dimly in the shop itself, as though its plethora sat heavy on their lungs;

and glancing, then, at one of the two faces by the parlour-fire; Trotty had

small difficulty in recognising in the stout old lady, Mrs. Chickenstalker:

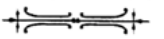
always inclined to corpulency, even in the days when he had known her

as established in the general line, and having a small balance against him

in her books.

The features of her companion were less easy to him. The great broad

chin, with creases in it large enough to hide a finger in; the astonished



eyes, that seemed to expostulate with themselves for sinking deeper and

deeper into the yielding fat of the soft face; the nose afflicted with that

disordered action of its functions which is generally termed The Snuffles;

the short thick throat and labouring chest, with other beauties of the like

description; though calculated to impress the memory, Trotty could at

first allot to nobody he had ever known: and yet he had some recollection

of them too. At length, in Mrs. Chickenstalker's partner in the general

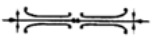
line, and in the crooked and eccentric line of life, he recognised the

former porter of Sir Joseph Bowley; an apoplectic innocent, who had

connected himself in Trotty's mind with Mrs. Chickenstalker years ago,

by giving him admission to the mansion where he had confessed his

obligations to that lady, and drawn on his unlucky head such grave



reproach.

Trotty had little interest in a change like this, after the changes he had

seen; but association is very strong sometimes; and he looked

involuntarily behind the parlour-door, where the accounts of credit

customers were usually kept in chalk. There was no record of his[68]

name. Some names were there, but they were strange to him, and

infinitely fewer than of old; from which he argued that the porter was an

advocate of ready-money transactions, and on coming into the business

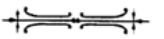
had looked pretty sharp after the Chickenstalker defaulters.

So desolate was Trotty, and so mournful for the youth and promise of his

blighted child, that it was a sorrow to him, even to have no place in Mrs.

Chickenstalker's ledger.

'What sort of a night is it, Anne?' inquired the former porter of Sir



Joseph Bowley, stretching out his legs before the fire, and rubbing as

much of them as his short arms could reach; with an air that added,

‘Here I am if it’s bad, and I don’t want to go out if it’s good.’

‘Blowing and sleeting hard,’ returned his wife; ‘and threatening

snow. Dark. And very cold.’

‘I’m glad to think we had muffins,’ said the former porter, in the tone of

one who had set his conscience at rest. ‘It’s a sort of night that’s meant

for muffins. Likewise crumpets. Also Sally Lunns.’

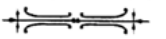
The former porter mentioned each successive kind of eatable, as if he

were musingly summing up his good actions. After which he rubbed his

fat legs as before, and jerking them at the knees to get the fire upon the

yet unroasted parts, laughed as if somebody had tickled him.

‘You’re in spirits, Tugby, my dear,’ observed his wife.



The firm was Tugby, late Chickenstalker.

‘No,’ said Tugby. ‘No. Not particular. I’m a little elewated. The muffins

came so pat!’

With that he chuckled until he was black in the face; and had so much

ado to become any other colour, that his fat legs took the strangest

excursions into the air. Nor were they reduced to anything like decorum

until Mrs. Tugby had thumped him violently on the back, and shaken

him as if he were a great bottle.

‘Good gracious, goodness, lord-a-mercy bless and save the man!’ cried

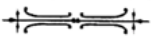
Mrs. Tugby, in great terror. ‘What’s he doing?’[69]

Mr. Tugby wiped his eyes, and faintly repeated that he found himself a

little elewated.

‘Then don’t be so again, that’s a dear good soul,’ said Mrs. Tugby, ‘if you

don’t want to frighten me to death, with your struggling and fighting!’



Mr. Tugby said he wouldn't; but, his whole existence was a fight, in

which, if any judgment might be founded on the constantly-increasing

shortness of his breath, and the deepening purple of his face, he was

always getting the worst of it.

'So it's blowing, and sleeting, and threatening snow; and it's dark, and

very cold, is it, my dear?' said Mr. Tugby, looking at the fire, and

reverting to the cream and marrow of his temporary elevation.

'Hard weather indeed,' returned his wife, shaking her head.

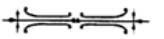
'Aye, aye! Years,' said Mr. Tugby, 'are like Christians in that

respect. Some of 'em die hard; some of 'em die easy. This one hasn't

many days to run, and is making a fight for it. I like him all the

better. There's a customer, my love!'

Attentive to the rattling door, Mrs. Tugby had already risen.



‘Now then!’ said that lady, passing out into the little shop. ‘What’s

wanted? Oh! I beg your pardon, sir, I’m sure. I didn’t think it was you.’

She made this apology to a gentleman in black, who, with his wristbands

tucked up, and his hat cocked loungingly on one side, and his hands in

his pockets, sat down astride on the table-beer barrel, and nodded in

return.

‘This is a bad business up-stairs, Mrs. Tugby,’ said the gentleman. ‘The

man can’t live.’

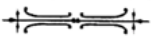
‘Not the back-attic can’t!’ cried Tugby, coming out into the shop to join

the conference.

‘The back-attic, Mr. Tugby,’ said the gentleman, ‘is coming down-stairs

fast, and will be below the basement very soon.’[70]

Looking by turns at Tugby and his wife, he sounded the barrel with his



knuckles for the depth of beer, and having found it, played a tune upon

the empty part.

‘The back-attic, Mr. Tugby,’ said the gentleman: Tugby having stood in

silent consternation for some time: ‘is Going.’

‘Then,’ said Tugby, turning to his wife, ‘he must Go, you know, before

he’s Gone.’

‘I don’t think you can move him,’ said the gentleman, shaking his

head. ‘I wouldn’t take the responsibility of saying it could be done,

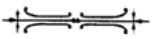
myself. You had better leave him where he is. He can’t live long.’

‘It’s the only subject,’ said Tugby, bringing the butter-scale down upon

the counter with a crash, by weighing his fist on it, ‘that we’ve ever had a

word upon; she and me; and look what it comes to! He’s going to die

here, after all. Going to die upon the premises. Going to die in our



house!'

'And where should he have died, Tugby?' cried his wife.

'In the workhouse,' he returned. 'What are workhouses made for?'

'Not for that,' said Mrs. Tugby, with great energy. 'Not for that! Neither

did I marry you for that. Don't think it, Tugby. I won't have it. I won't

allow it. I'd be separated first, and never see your face again. When my

widow's name stood over that door, as it did for many years: this house

being known as Mrs. Chickenstalker's far and wide, and never known but

to its honest credit and its good report: when my widow's name stood

over that door, Tugby, I knew him as a handsome, steady, manly,

independent youth; I knew her as the sweetest-looking, sweetest-

tempered girl, eyes ever saw; I knew her father (poor old creetur, he fell

down from the steeple walking in his sleep, and killed himself), for the

simplest, hardest-working, childest-hearted man, that ever drew the

breath of life; and when I turn them out of house and home, may angels

turn me out of Heaven. As they would! And serve me right!'

Her old face, which had been a plump and dimpled one before the

changes which had come to pass, seemed to shine out of her as she said

these words; and when she dried her eyes, and shook her head and her[71]

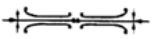
handkerchief at Tugby, with an expression of firmness which it was quite

clear was not to be easily resisted, Trotty said, 'Bless her! Bless her!'

Then he listened, with a panting heart, for what should follow. Knowing

nothing yet, but that they spoke of Meg.

If Tugby had been a little elevated in the parlour, he more than balanced



that account by being not a little depressed in the shop, where he now

stood staring at his wife, without attempting a reply; secretly conveying,

however—either in a fit of abstraction or as a precautionary measure—all

the money from the till into his own pockets, as he looked at her.

The gentleman upon the table-beer cask, who appeared to be some

authorised medical attendant upon the poor, was far too well

accustomed, evidently, to little differences of opinion between man and

wife, to interpose any remark in this instance. He sat softly whistling,

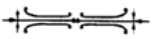
and turning little drops of beer out of the tap upon the ground, until

there was a perfect calm: when he raised his head, and said to Mrs.

Tugby, late Chickenstalker:

‘There’s something interesting about the woman, even now. How did she

come to marry him?’



‘Why that,’ said Mrs. Tugby, taking a seat near him, ‘is not the least cruel

part of her story, sir. You see they kept company, she and Richard, many

years ago. When they were a young and beautiful couple, everything was

settled, and they were to have been married on a New Year’s Day. But,

somehow, Richard got it into his head, through what the gentlemen told

him, that he might do better, and that he’d soon repent it, and that she

wasn’t good enough for him, and that a young man of spirit had no

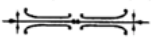
business to be married. And the gentlemen frightened her, and made

her melancholy, and timid of his deserting her, and of her children

coming to the gallows, and of its being wicked to be man and wife, and a

good deal more of it. And in short, they lingered and lingered, and their

trust in one another was broken, and so at last was the match. But the



fault was his. She would have married him, sir, joyfully. I've seen her

heart swell many times afterwards, when he passed her in a proud and

careless way; and never did a woman grieve more truly for a man, than

she for Richard when he first went wrong.'[72]

'Oh! he went wrong, did he?' said the gentleman, pulling out the vent-

peg of the table-beer, and trying to peep down into the barrel through

the hole.

'Well, sir, I don't know that he rightly understood himself, you see. I

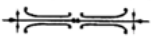
think his mind was troubled by their having broke with one another; and

that but for being ashamed before the gentlemen, and perhaps for being

uncertain too, how she might take it, he'd have gone through any

suffering or trial to have had Meg's promise and Meg's hand

again. That's my belief. He never said so; more's the pity! He took to



drinking, idling, bad companions: all the fine resources that were to be

so much better for him than the Home he might have had. He lost his

looks, his character, his health, his strength, his friends, his work:

everything!'

'He didn't lose everything, Mrs. Tugby,' returned the gentleman, 'because

he gained a wife; and I want to know how he gained her.'

'I'm coming to it, sir, in a moment. This went on for years and years; he

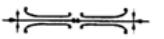
sinking lower and lower; she enduring, poor thing, miseries enough to

wear her life away. At last, he was so cast down, and cast out, that no

one would employ or notice him; and doors were shut upon him, go

where he would. Applying from place to place, and door to door; and

coming for the hundredth time to one gentleman who had often and



often tried him (he was a good workman to the very end); that

gentleman, who knew his history, said, “I believe you are incorrigible;

there is only one person in the world who has a chance of reclaiming you;

ask me to trust you no more, until she tries to do it.” Something like

that, in his anger and vexation.’

‘Ah!’ said the gentleman. ‘Well?’

‘Well, sir, he went to her, and kneeled to her; said it was so; said it ever

had been so; and made a prayer to her to save him.’

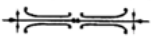
‘And she?—Don’t distress yourself, Mrs. Tugby.’

‘She came to me that night to ask me about living here. “What he was

once to me,” she said, “is buried in a grave, side by side with what I was

to him. But I have thought of this; and I will make the trial. In the hope

of saving him; for the love of the light-hearted girl (you remember her)[73]



who was to have been married on a New Year's Day; and for the love of

her Richard." And she said he had come to her from Lilian, and Lilian

had trusted to him, and she never could forget that. So they were

married; and when they came home here, and I saw them, I hoped that

such prophecies as parted them when they were young, may not often

fulfil themselves as they did in this case, or I wouldn't be the makers of

them for a Mine of Gold.'

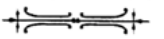
The gentleman got off the cask, and stretched himself, observing:

'I suppose he used her ill, as soon as they were married?'

'I don't think he ever did that,' said Mrs. Tugby, shaking her head, and

wiping her eyes. 'He went on better for a short time; but, his habits were

too old and strong to be got rid of; he soon fell back a little; and was



falling fast back, when his illness came so strong upon him. I think he

has always felt for her. I am sure he has. I have seen him, in his crying

fits and tremblings, try to kiss her hand; and I have heard him call her

“Meg,” and say it was her nineteenth birthday. There he has been lying,

now, these weeks and months. Between him and her baby, she has not

been able to do her old work; and by not being able to be regular, she has

lost it, even if she could have done it. How they have lived, I hardly

know!’

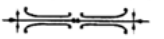
‘I know,’ muttered Mr. Tugby; looking at the till, and round the shop,

and at his wife; and rolling his head with immense intelligence. ‘Like

Fighting Cocks!’

He was interrupted by a cry—a sound of lamentation—from the upper

story of the house. The gentleman moved hurriedly to the door.



‘My friend,’ he said, looking back, ‘you needn’t discuss whether he shall

be removed or not. He has spared you that trouble, I believe.’

Saying so, he ran up-stairs, followed by Mrs. Tugby; while Mr. Tugby

panted and grumbled after them at leisure: being rendered more than

commonly short-winded by the weight of the till, in which there had

been an inconvenient quantity of copper. Trotty, with the child beside

him, floated up the staircase like mere air.[74]

‘Follow her! Follow her! Follow her!’ He heard the ghostly voices in the

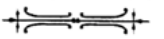
Bells repeat their words as he ascended. ‘Learn it, from the creature

dearest to your heart!’

It was over. It was over. And this was she, her father’s pride and

joy! This haggard, wretched woman, weeping by the bed, if it deserved

that name, and pressing to her breast, and hanging down her head upon,



an infant. Who can tell how spare, how sickly, and how poor an

infant! Who can tell how dear!

‘Thank God!’ cried Trotty, holding up his folded hands. ‘O, God be

thanked! She loves her child!’

The gentleman, not otherwise hard-hearted or indifferent to such scenes,

than that he saw them every day, and knew that they were figures of no

moment in the Filer sums—mere scratches in the working of these

calculations—laid his hand upon the heart that beat no more, and

listened for the breath, and said, ‘His pain is over. It’s better as it

is!’ Mrs. Tugby tried to comfort her with kindness. Mr. Tugby tried

philosophy.

‘Come, come!’ he said, with his hands in his pockets, ‘you mustn’t give

way, you know. That won’t do. You must fight up. What would have

become of me if *I* had given way when I was porter, and we had as many

as six runaway carriage-doubles at our door in one night! But, I fell back

upon my strength of mind, and didn't open it!'

Again Trotty heard the voices saying, 'Follow her!' He turned towards

his guide, and saw it rising from him, passing through the air. 'Follow

her!' it said. And vanished.

He hovered round her; sat down at her feet; looked up into her face for

one trace of her old self; listened for one note of her old pleasant

voice. He flitted round the child: so wan, so prematurely old, so dreadful

in its gravity, so plaintive in its feeble, mournful, miserable wail. He

almost worshipped it. He clung to it as her only safeguard; as the last

unbroken link that bound her to endurance. He set his father's hope and

trust on the frail baby; watched her every look upon it as she held it in

her arms; and cried a thousand times, ‘She loves it! God be thanked, she

loves it!’[75]

He saw the woman tend her in the night; return to her when her

grudging husband was asleep, and all was still; encourage her, shed tears

with her, set nourishment before her. He saw the day come, and the

night again; the day, the night; the time go by; the house of death

relieved of death; the room left to herself and to the child; he heard it

moan and cry; he saw it harass her, and tire her out, and when she

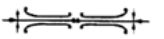
slumbered in exhaustion, drag her back to consciousness, and hold her

with its little hands upon the rack; but she was constant to it, gentle with

it, patient with it. Patient! Was its loving mother in her inmost heart

and soul, and had its Being knitted up with hers as when she carried it

unborn.



All this time, she was in want: languishing away, in dire and pining

want. With the baby in her arms, she wandered here and there, in quest

of occupation; and with its thin face lying in her lap, and looking up in

hers, did any work for any wretched sum; a day and night of labour for as

many farthings as there were figures on the dial. If she had quarrelled

with it; if she had neglected it; if she had looked upon it with a moment's

hate; if, in the frenzy of an instant, she had struck it! No. His comfort

was, She loved it always.

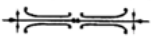
She told no one of her extremity, and wandered abroad in the day lest

she should be questioned by her only friend: for any help she received

from her hands, occasioned fresh disputes between the good woman and

her husband; and it was new bitterness to be the daily cause of strife and

discord, where she owed so much.



She loved it still. She loved it more and more. But a change fell on the

aspect of her love. One night.

She was singing faintly to it in its sleep, and walking to and fro to hush it,

when her door was softly opened, and a man looked in.

‘For the last time,’ he said.

‘William Fern!’

‘For the last time.’

He listened like a man pursued: and spoke in whispers.[76]

‘Margaret, my race is nearly run. I couldn’t finish it, without a parting

word with you. Without one grateful word.’

‘What have you done?’ she asked: regarding him with terror.

He looked at her, but gave no answer.

After a short silence, he made a gesture with his hand, as if he set her

question by; as if he brushed it aside; and said:

‘It’s long ago, Margaret, now: but that night is as fresh in my memory as

ever 'twas. We little thought, then,' he added, looking round, 'that we

should ever meet like this. Your child, Margaret? Let me have it in my

arms. Let me hold your child.'

He put his hat upon the floor, and took it. And he trembled as he took it,

from head to foot.

'Is it a girl?'

'Yes.'

He put his hand before its little face.

'See how weak I'm grown, Margaret, when I want the courage to look at

it! Let her be, a moment. I won't hurt her. It's long ago, but—What's

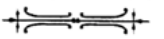
her name?'

'Margaret,' she answered, quickly.

'I'm glad of that,' he said. 'I'm glad of that!' He seemed to breathe more

freely; and after pausing for an instant, took away his hand, and looked

upon the infant's face. But covered it again, immediately.



‘Margaret!’ he said; and gave her back the child. ‘It’s Lilian’s.’

‘Lilian’s!’

‘I held the same face in my arms when Lilian’s mother died and left her.’

‘When Lilian’s mother died and left her!’ she repeated, wildly.

‘How shrill you speak! Why do you fix your eyes upon me so? Margaret!’[77]

She sunk down in a chair, and pressed the infant to her breast, and wept

over it. Sometimes, she released it from her embrace, to look anxiously

in its face: then strained it to her bosom again. At those times, when she

gazed upon it, then it was that something fierce and terrible began to

mingle with her love. Then it was that her old father quailed.

‘Follow her!’ was sounded through the house. ‘Learn it, from the

creature dearest to your heart!’

‘Margaret,’ said Fern, bending over her, and kissing her upon the brow: ‘I

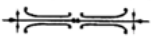
thank you for the last time. Good night. Good bye! Put your hand in mine, and tell me you'll forget me from this hour, and try to think the end of me was here.'

'What have you done?' she asked again.

'There'll be a Fire to-night,' he said, removing from her. 'There'll be Fires this winter-time, to light the dark nights, East, West, North, and South. When you see the distant sky red, they'll be blazing. When you see the distant sky red, think of me no more; or, if you do, remember what a Hell was lighted up inside of me, and think you see its flames reflected in the clouds. Good night. Good bye!' She called to him; but he was gone. She sat down stupefied, until her infant roused her to a sense of hunger, cold, and darkness. She paced the room with it the livelong night, hushing it and soothing it. She said at intervals, 'Like Lilian, when her mother died and left her!' Why was her step so quick,her eye so wild, her love so fierce and terrible, whenever she repeated those words?

'But, it is Love,' said Trotty. 'It is Love. She'll never cease to love it. My poor Meg!'

She dressed the child next morning with unusual care —ah, vain expenditure of care upon such squalid robes!—and once more tried to find some means of life. It was the last day of the Old Year. She tried till night, and never broke her fast. She tried in vain.



She mingled with an abject crowd, who tarried in the snow, until it pleased some officer appointed to dispense the public charity (the lawful charity; not that once preached upon a Mount), to call them in, and question them, and say to this one, ‘Go to such a place,’ to that one,[78]

‘Come next week;’ to make a football of another wretch, and pass him here and there, from hand to hand, from house to house, until he wearied and lay down to die; or started up and robbed, and so became a higher sort of criminal, whose claims allowed of no delay. Here, too, she failed.

She loved her child, and wished to have it lying on her breast. was quite enough.

And that It was night: a bleak, dark, cutting night: when, pressing the child close to her for warmth, she arrived outside the house she called her home. She was so faint and giddy, that she saw no one standing in the doorway until she was close upon it, and about to enter. Then, she recognised the master of the house, who had so disposed himself—with his person it was not difficult—as to fill up the whole entry.

‘O!’ he said softly. ‘You have come back?’

She looked at the child, and shook her head.

‘Don’t you think you have lived here long enough without paying any rent? Don’t you think that,

without any money, you've been a pretty constant customer at this shop, now?' said Mr. Tugby.

She repeated the same mute appeal.

'Suppose you try and deal somewhere else,' he said. 'And suppose you provide yourself with another lodging. Come! Don't you think you could manage it?'

She said in a low voice, that it was very late. To-morrow.

'Now I see what you want,' said Tugby; 'and what you mean. You know there are two parties in this house about you, and you delight in setting 'em by the ears. I don't want any quarrels; I'm speaking softly to avoid a quarrel; but if you don't go away, I'll speak out loud, and you shall cause words high enough to please you. But you shan't come in. That I am determined.'

She put her hair back with her hand, and looked in a sudden manner at the sky, and the dark lowering distance.

'This is the last night of an Old Year, and I won't carry ill-blood and quarrellings and disturbances into a New One, to please you nor anybody else,' said Tugby, who was quite a retail Friend and Father. 'I wonder you an't ashamed of yourself, to carry such practices into a New Year. If you haven't any business in the world, but to be always giving way, and always

making disturbances between man and wife, you'd be better out of it. Go along with you.'

'Follow her! To desperation!'

Again the old man heard the voices. Looking up, he saw the figures hovering in the air, and pointing where she went, down the dark street.

'She loves it!' he exclaimed, in agonised entreaty for her. 'Chimes! she loves it still!'

'Follow her!' The shadow swept upon the track she had taken, like a cloud.

He joined in the pursuit; he kept close to her; he looked into her face. He saw the same fierce and terrible expression mingling with her love, and kindling in her eyes. He heard her say, 'Like Lilian! To be changed like Lilian!' and her speed redoubled.

O, for something to awaken her! For any sight, or sound, or scent, to call

up tender recollections in a brain on fire! For any gentle image of the past, to rise before her!

'I was her father! I was her father!' cried the old man, stretching out his hands to the dark shadows flying on above. 'Have mercy on her, and on me! Where does she go? Turn her back! I was her father!'

But they only pointed to her, as she hurried on; and said, 'To desperation! Learn it from the creature

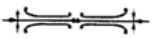
dearest to your heart!' A hundred voices echoed it. The air was made of breath expended in those words. He seemed to take them in, at every gasp he drew. They were everywhere, and not to be escaped. And still she hurried on; the same light in her eyes, the same words in her mouth, 'Like Lilian! To be changed like Lilian!' All at once she stopped.

'Now, turn her back!' exclaimed the old man, tearing his white hair. 'My child! Meg! Turn her back! Great Father, turn her back!'

In her own scanty shawl, she wrapped the baby warm. With her fevered hands, she smoothed its limbs, composed its face, arranged its mean attire. In her wasted arms she folded it, as though she never would resign it more. And with her dry lips, kissed it in a final pang, and last long agony of Love.

Putting its tiny hand up to her neck, and holding it there, within her dress, next to her distracted heart, she set its sleeping face against her: closely, steadily, against her: and sped onward to the River.

To the rolling River, swift and dim, where Winter Night sat brooding like the last dark thoughts of many who had sought a refuge there before her. Where scattered lights upon the banks gleamed sullen, red, and dull, as torches that were burning there, to show the way to Death. Where no abode of living people cast its shadow, on the deep, impenetrable, melancholy shade.



To the River! To that portal of Eternity, her desperate footsteps tended with the swiftness of its rapid waters running to the sea. He tried to touch her as she passed him, going down to its dark level: but, the wild distempered form, the fierce and terrible love, the desperation that had left all human check or hold behind, swept by him like the wind.

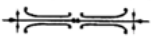
He followed her. She paused a moment on the brink before the dreadful plunge. He fell down on his knees, and in a shriek addressed the figures in the Bells now hovering above them.

'I have learnt it!' cried the old man. 'From the creature dearest to my heart! O, save her, save her!'

He could wind his fingers in her dress; could hold it! As the words escaped his lips, he felt his sense of touch return, and knew that he detained her.

The figures looked down steadfastly upon him.

'I have learnt it!' cried the old man. 'O, have mercy on me in this hour, if, in my love for her, so young and good, I slandered Nature in the breasts of mothers rendered desperate! Pity my presumption, wickedness, and ignorance, and save her.' He felt his hold relaxing. They were silent still.

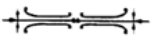


‘Have mercy on her!’ he exclaimed, ‘as one in whom this dreadful crime has sprung from Love perverted; from the strongest, deepest Love we fallen creatures know! Think what her misery must have been, when such seed bears such fruit! Heaven meant her to be good. There is no loving mother on the earth who might not come to this, if such a life had gone before. O, have mercy on my child, who, even at this pass, means mercy to her own, and dies herself, and perils her immortal soul, to save it!’

She was in his arms. He held her now. His strength was like a giant’s.

‘I see the Spirit of the Chimes among you!’ cried the old man, singling out the child, and speaking in some inspiration, which their looks conveyed to him. ‘I know that our inheritance is held in store for us by Time. I know there is a sea of Time to rise one day, before which all who wrong us or oppress us will be swept away like leaves. I see it, on the flow! I know that we must trust and hope, and neither doubt ourselves, nor doubt the good in one another. I have learnt it from the creature dearest to my heart. I clasp her in my arms again. O Spirits, merciful and good, I take your lesson to my breast along with her! O Spirits, merciful and good, I am grateful!’

He might have said more; but, the Bells, the old familiar Bells, his own dear, constant, steady friends, the Chimes, began to ring the joy-peals for a New



Year: so lustily, so merrily, so happily, so gaily, that he leapt upon his feet, and broke the spell that bound him.

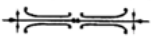
'And whatever you do, father,' said Meg, 'don't eat tripe again, without asking some doctor whether it's likely to agree with you; for how you *have* been going on, Good gracious!'

She was working with her needle, at the little table by the fire; dressing her simple gown with ribbons for her wedding. So quietly happy, so blooming and youthful, so full of beautiful promise, that he uttered a great cry as if it were an Angel in his house; then flew to clasp her in his arms.

But, he caught his feet in the newspaper, which had fallen on the hearth; and somebody came rushing in between them.

'No!' cried the voice of this same somebody; a generous and jolly voice it was! 'Not even you. Not even you. The first kiss of Meg in the New Year is mine. Mine! I have been waiting outside the house, this hour, to hear the Bells and claim it. Meg, my precious prize, a happy year! A life of happy years, my darling wife!'

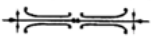
And Richard smothered her with kisses.



You never in all your life saw anything like Trotty after this. I don't care where you have lived or what you have seen; you never in all your life saw anything at all approaching him! He sat down in his chair and beat his knees and cried; he sat down in his chair and beat his knees and laughed; he sat down in his chair and beat his knees and laughed and cried together; he got out of his chair and hugged Meg; he got out of his chair and hugged Richard; he got out of his chair and hugged them both at once; he kept running up to Meg, and squeezing her fresh face between his hands and kissing it, going from her backwards not to lose sight of it, and running up again like a figure in a magic lantern; and whatever he did, he was constantly sitting himself down in his chair, and never stopping in it for one single moment; being— that's the truth— beside himself with joy.

'And to-morrow's your wedding-day, my pet!' cried Trotty. 'Your real, happy wedding-day!'

'To-day!' cried Richard, shaking hands with him. 'To-day. The Chimes are ringing in the New Year. Hear them!' They were ringing! Bless their sturdy hearts, they were ringing! Great Bells as they were; melodious, deep-mouthed, noble Bells; cast in no common metal; made by no common founder; when had they ever chimed like that, before!



‘But, to-day, my pet,’ said Trotty. ‘You and Richard had some words to- day.’

‘Because he’s such a bad fellow, father,’ said Meg. ‘An’t you, Richard? Such a headstrong, violent man! He’d have made no more of speaking his mind to that great Alderman, and putting *him* down I don’t know where, than he would of—’

‘—Kissing Meg,’ suggested Richard. Doing it too!

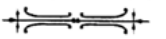
‘No. Not a bit more,’ said Meg. ‘But I wouldn’t let him, father. Where would have been the use!’

‘Richard my boy!’ cried Trotty. ‘You was turned up Trumps originally; and Trumps you must be, till you die! But, you were crying by the fire to-night, my pet, when I came home! Why did you cry by the fire?’

‘I was thinking of the years we’ve passed together, father. Only that. And thinking that you might miss me, and be lonely.’

Trotty was backing off to that extraordinary chair again, when the child, who had been awakened by the noise, came running in half-dressed.

‘Why, here she is!’ cried Trotty, catching her up. ‘Here’s little Lilian! Ha ha ha! Here we are and here we go! O here we are and here we go again! And here we are and here we go! and Uncle Will too!’ Stopping in his trot to greet him heartily. ‘O, Uncle Will, the vision that I’ve had to- night, through lodging you! O,



Uncle Will, the obligations that you've laid me under, by your coming, my good friend!'

Before Will Fern could make the least reply, a band of music burst into the room, attended by a lot of neighbours, screaming 'A Happy New

Year, Meg!' 'A Happy Wedding!' 'Many of 'em!' and other fragmentary good wishes of that sort. The Drum (who was a private friend of Trotty's) then stepped forward, and said: 'Trotty Veck, my boy! It's got about, that your daughter is going to be married to-morrow. There an't a soul that knows you that don't wish you well, or that knows her and don't wish her well. Or that knows you both, and don't wish you both all the happiness the New Year can bring. And here we are, to play it in and dance it in, accordingly.'

Which was received with a general shout. The Drum was rather drunk, by-the-bye; but, never mind.

'What a happiness it is, I'm sure,' said Trotty, 'to be so esteemed! How kind and neighbourly you are! It's all along of my dear daughter. She deserves it!'

They were ready for a dance in half a second (Meg and Richard at the top); and the Drum was on the very brink of feathering away with all his power; when a combination of prodigious sounds was heard outside, and a good-humoured comely woman of some fifty years of age, or thereabouts, came running in, attended by a man bearing a stone pitcher of

terrific size, and closely followed by the marrow-bones and cleavers, and the bells; not *the* Bells, but a portable collection on a frame.

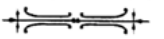
Trotty said, 'It's Mrs. Chickenstalker!' And sat down and beat his knees again.

'Married, and not tell me, Meg!' cried the good woman. 'Never! I couldn't rest on the last night of the Old Year without coming to wish you joy. I couldn't have done it, Meg. Not if I had been bed-ridden. So here I am; and as it's New Year's Eve, and the Eve of your wedding too, my dear, I had a little flip made, and brought it with me.'

Mrs. Chickenstalker's notion of a little flip did honour to her character. The pitcher steamed and smoked and reeked like a volcano; and the man who had carried it, was faint.

'Mrs. Tugby!' said Trotty, who had been going round and round her, in an ecstasy.—'I *should* say, Chickenstalker—Bless your heart and soul! A Happy New Year, and many of 'em! Mrs. Tugby,' said Trotty when he had saluted her;—'I *should* say, Chickenstalker—This is William Fern and Lilian.'

The worthy dame, to his surprise, turned very pale and very red.



‘Not Lilian Fern whose mother died in Dorsetshire!’ said she.

Her uncle answered ‘Yes,’ and meeting hastily, they exchanged some hurried words together; of which the upshot was, that Mrs. Chickenstalker shook him by both hands; saluted Trotty on his cheek again of her own free will; and took the child to her capacious breast.

‘Will Fern!’ said Trotty, pulling on his right-hand muffler. ‘Not the friend you was hoping to find?’

‘Ay!’ returned Will, putting a hand on each of Trotty’s shoulders. ‘And like to prove a’most as good a friend, if that can be, as one I found.’

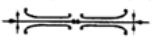
‘O!’ said Trotty. ‘Please to play up there. Will you have the goodness!’

To the music of the band, and, the bells, the marrow-bones and cleavers, all at once; and while the Chimes were yet in lusty operation out of doors; Trotty, making Meg and Richard, second couple, led off Mrs. Chickenstalker down the dance, and danced it in a step unknown before or since; founded on his own peculiar trot.

Had Trotty dreamed?

Or, are his joys and sorrows, and the actors in them, but a dream; himself a dream; the teller of this tale a dreamer, waking but now? If it be so, O listener, dear to him in all his visions, try to bear in mind the stern realities from which these shadows come; and in your sphere— none is too wide, and none too limited for such an end—endeavour to correct, improve, and soften them.

So may the New Year be a happy one to you, happy to many more whose happiness depends on you! So may each year be happier than the last, and not the meanest of our brethren or sisterhood debarred their rightful share, in what our Great Creator formed them to enjoy.



THE END

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